















# RUSSIA WITHOUT ILLUSIONS

*By The Author*

SOVIET DEMOCRACY

RUSSIA, FRIEND OR FOE?

HOW THE SOVIET STATE IS RUN

RUSSIA RESISTS

RUSSIA IN PEACE AND IN WAR

*Edited by the Author*

JOHN CORNFORD—A MEMOIR

R U S S I A  
WITHOUT ILLUSIONS

*By*  
PAT SLOAN

WITH A PREFACE BY  
BEATRICE WEBB

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## PREFACE

**I** strongly recommend this book for serious consideration by students of Soviet Communism. Unpretentious in its style, but original and authentic in its information, it gives the reader a vision of a worker's life as experienced by the author during various visits to the U. S. S. R., from 1931 to 1937, one lasting for three years : not as a tourist but as an employee in one or two Soviet institutions.

For instance, he was elected by his fellow workers as a trade union organizer and the editor of a wall-newspaper, and thus gained an intimate knowledge of how trade unionism works in the U. S. S. R. The list of functions of a trade union organizer described by the author appears to be very extensive. "Every year a new collective agreement had to be signed with the administration. This meant that the rates of pay of every worker had to be overhauled, and taking into account the general scales worked out by the higher committees in the union, it was our job to apply and adjust them to our own particular conditions. No collective agreement was drawn up without general discussion by all the workers of the old and new rates of wages, so that there was never a single individual who did not know why he earned what he did, and how more could be earned if he desired. But the collective agreement did not only fix the wage-rate for the coming year. The discussion on the new agreement invariably surveyed the whole economic and social life of the organization during the year, and the 'wall-newspaper' was a forum in which such matters were fully explored : To what extent had the administration fulfilled its obligations to provide adequate comfort for the staff? Had the buffet and dining-room been run as agreed at the beginning of the year? Were the children of the workers receiving adequate crèche

and kindergarten accommodation? Was the administration paying enough attention to the matter of safety devices and ventilation? All these matters were discussed in detail by all who wished to contribute to the 'wall-newspaper.' And on the basis of such discussion the new collective agreement would be drawn up and signed" (pp. 144-5). But this is not all. The trade union organizer has to see to the actual expenditure of the huge insurance fund handed over to the trade unions every year, to provide sickness benefit, holidays with pay, and passes to rest homes, tickets to theatres and operas, and to press for more housing accommodation, of which there is even at present an acute shortage. "The question in the U. S. S. R. to-day is not trade union control or control by employers. To-day it is the question of good trade union control or bad trade union control. And you have only to read the Soviet trade union newspaper *Trud* (Labour) to realize that there is bad work as well as good. But in the U. S. S. R., such bad work is exposed with the maximum of publicity, and in this the U. S. S. R. is different from other countries. Constant exposure of bureaucracy and inefficiency is bound to lead to the gradual annihilation of these faults—which is the great hope of the U. S. S. R. as compared with the rest of the world" (p. 147).

In the final chapters of the book the usual objections to Soviet Communism are dealt with "without illusions," though with the partisanship of a convinced convert. Particularly significant are Chapters XV and XVI, giving the author's impressions on "The Question of Freedom" and "This One-Party Business." In respect to individual liberty he accentuates the contradiction between the absence of restraint and the presence of opportunity. He admits that there is, in the U. S. S. R., restraint in expression of opinion hostile to the established order, though he suggests that we in England are not quite so free in this respect as some people seem to think. Would an elementary school teacher be permitted to advocate republicanism, atheism or communism; not to his school children, which,

of course, would be out of bounds, but even publicly on the village green or in the adjacent Working Men's Club? Are Soviet citizens permitted to go to India, and are not all Communist documents banned in that part, and other parts of the British Empire? But he makes the far more important objection to the current abuse of the U. S. S. R., in suggesting that the type of freedom which they have developed to an immeasurably greater extent than we have in the United Kingdom, is the presence of opportunity open to all the inhabitants without distinction of sex or race, or occupation, to live the good life and enjoy not only their work but also their leisure, in art and literature and, above all, in the spirit of adventure.

Perhaps the reflections made by this Cambridge graduate with a First in Economics, who has himself been an assistant lecturer in that subject at the Welsh University, are the most controversial, and be it added amusing, passages in the book. He compares "Marshallian" economics as taught in Cambridge, with what he calls the scientific Marxian interpretation of history, in which comparison he sees a striking analogy to the contrast afforded by medieval alchemy and astrology, on the one hand, to modern chemistry and astronomy on the other. The sort of stuff he was taught at Cambridge, and was paid to teach in a Welsh University was, he says, round-about-reasoning based on unverified assumptions, ending in contradictory conclusions, by the rival theorists who took conflicting views of the working of the "economic calculus" in the world to-day. "When, therefore, people say to me that in the U. S. S. R. students are only free to learn what the authorities want them to, my answer is 'Yes, that is so'; but the authorities there are interested in teaching scientific history and economics, while in this country everything possible is done to prevent them from achieving that scientific understanding. I, therefore, find that they are more free there than here to obtain a scientific understanding of the society in which they live" (p. 189).

As I do not presume to be an abstract economist and

have never been able to understand what exactly economists mean by the "economic calculus" (is it the profit-making motive as exemplified in the price system?), except that I note that contemplation of this mysterious force leads to an amazing variety of conclusions as to what does or what ought to happen, where it prevails, I will not offer any observations on Mr. Pat Sloan's relative valuation of Cambridge economics and Marxian dialectics. Personally, I prefer the utilitarian calculus, by which I mean the greatest good of the greatest number, a calculus which I believe controls the Soviet Gosplan, in its planned production for community consumption.

PASSFIELD CORNER

LIPHOOK

*September, 1938*

BEATRICE WEBB

## FOREWORD TO SECOND INDIAN EDITION

**T**HIS book was first published in London in 1938. It describes my experiences in the U. S. S. R. between 1931 and 1937. Since those years many changes have taken place in the world. From wars which only then afflicted China and Spain, the whole world has become involved in armed conflict. And a great part of the Soviet Union which I personally visited is to-day enemy-occupied territory or a bloody battlefield. The Dnieproghes Dam, which I saw officially opened, has been deliberately blown up to keep it out of enemy hands. The city of Kharkov has changed hands three times in the past two years.

And whereas, in 1938, the Soviet Union was being officially misrepresented to the peoples of the British Empire as a land of poverty and dictatorship, to-day it is respected and admired as our most gallant ally, the country which turned the war from a series of Axis triumphs to Axis defeats. The Stalingrad which I saw in the making in 1932 became, in 1942, the turning-point in the greatest war in history.

Re-reading these pages, I find there is little that requires supplementing. However, at the end of certain chapters I have appended notes to bring the commentary up to date. For a study of those developments which followed the Nazi invasion, I would refer the reader to my more recent book, *RUSSIA RESISTS*.

To-day, when Britain and the U. S. S. R., together with China and the U. S. A., are united against the forces of Fascist imperialism, I am particularly glad that a Second Edition of this book is to appear in India. No country in the world can rival the Soviet Union in the unity of its stand against Fascist imperialism, and many lessons can be learnt by all nations from the Soviet example.

In particular, as against the Fascist doctrine of racial and national discrimination, the Soviet Union leads the world as the champion of national equality. It is the one country in the world where even an insult based on race, nationality or colour is treated as a criminal offence. Much can and must be learnt from this by the British people in their attitude to India, and the peoples of India themselves can learn much from the Soviet Union which comprises, on the territory of the one-time Russian Empire, a commonwealth of many nationalities, including Russians and Ukrainians, Uzbeks and Tadjiks, Mongolians and Jews, all with completely equal rights of citizenship.

If this book helps to explain the people and social system of our great Soviet ally to the people of India, if it helps to strengthen the alliance of all that is democratic in India and Britain with the greatest anti-fascist power embodied in the Soviet Union, this second edition will have served its purpose.

*July, 1943*

PAT SLOAN

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## CHAPTER I

### WHY I WENT TO RUSSIA

**T**HE subject of Russia has been a controversial one for very many years. Before 1917 the glamour and romance of the Tsar's court, the gilded churches, and a mystical *mujik* steeped in the spiritual faith of 'Holy Russia', waged constant war in the minds of Englishmen with that other conception of Russia as a land of famine, of appalling oppression and Siberian exile. But since 1917 this controversy has intensified. More books have appeared on Russia since 1917 than on any other foreign country. And those who, like myself, have grown to maturity during the Post-War period, have always heard the word Russia mentioned with an unusual intensity, whether of enthusiasm or horror.

At the age of eleven, in the first year after the last war, I was on holiday with my parents on the west of Scotland. I can remember people in our hotel speaking about Russia. I still can see a smallish man, with spectacles, a moustache, and hair just turning grey, telling us how the Bolsheviks employed Chinese to devise special tortures for their victims, and how they skinned people's hands in boiling water. This was just as we were going out for a day's fishing. I remember it as vividly as I remember, a year or two earlier, a cook at a hotel where we were staying describing how the Germans were so brutal that they "even crucified a little kitten". Hundreds of thousands of children at that time must have had their hair stand on end at such tales of Russia. And yet, just a year later, Councils of Action were set up all over Britain by the Labour movement to deter the Government from any further acts of intervention against the Soviets. Millions

of working-class children must have heard their fathers talk of Russia with respect and enthusiasm. From that time to this two opposing points of view on Russia have continued to be expressed.

The next time that I was given particular cause to think about Russia was ten years later. My supervisor in Cambridge was interested in that country, though he never spoke of it to us unless we took the initiative. But on one occasion when he was organizing the showing of a Russian film I was asked to help, and "Mother", or "Potemkin" was shown in the Malting House School. It was impossible to cover the great sky-light windows at all effectively, the screen was wrinkled, and there was an enormous crowd in a very small and badly ventilated space. I remember that I did not see much of the film, but spent most of my time in the fresh air outside.

It was in North Wales, early in 1930, that my interest in Russia became more strongly aroused. At that time the Christian Protest Movement was campaigning the country, and a meeting was held in the Powys Hall of the University College at Bangor, where I was assistant lecturer in Economics. The case against Russia was put with such bitterness and such a disregard, it appeared, for any kind of accuracy, that I put several questions at the meeting, and later organized a debate on the subject in the town. From this time I felt a personal interest in a country which was being so furiously condemned, and yet which had apparently already won the respect of quite large numbers of people. I visited the Soviet Embassy in London to obtain information on the treatment of religion in Russia, and in the spring of 1931, during the Easter vacation, paid my first visit to Moscow as a tourist, hoping to find work in order to return there to live, to sample everyday life, in the autumn.

Like most English and American visitors—and there were already quite a few at that time—my first approach was to the editor of the *Moscow News*, a paper with which I had become acquainted since the meeting in the Powys Hall. Anna Louise Strong was not very sympathetic.

"Have you any experience of journalism?"—No, I had to confess that I had not. "What do you do in England?"—I told her that I was a university lecturer. "Then you had better see Mrs. Borodin at the Technicum of Foreign Languages"; and she rang up, promised to send me round at once, and put me on my way.

In 1931 it was not hard for a foreigner with any qualifications that might be useful to the U.S.S.R. to find work. It was harder to obtain living accommodation, but that, Mrs. Borodin told me, could be arranged. My academic qualifications were deemed adequate for teaching the English language to Soviet students. I was given a paper stating that from September onwards I would be a member of the staff of the Technicum. This paper obtained a *visa* for me a few months later without the delay that is usual under such circumstances.

All this, incidentally, takes very little time to put on paper. In fact, however, it took many long hours of waiting for appointments before that simple 'document' was obtained. Mrs. Borodin was, I found, an extremely busy woman, and my first visit to Moscow, in the spring of 1931, was spent to a considerable extent in waiting in line for interviews, in calling for the precious document that would bring me a *visa*, and in being told to come again to-morrow. As my main aim was to get a job, and as I had no other business in Moscow, I did not mind the delay. It was rather amusing. I can understand the exasperation, however, of certain penniless immigrants who had paid no preliminary visit beforehand, had landed in Moscow in search of a job and with very little money, and were kept hopping from one organization to another and back again while hard-worked officials took the necessary steps to find them suitable jobs. There was no shortage of work, but it was not always easy, as some foreigners failed to realize, to place each new-comer in just the job to which he or she might be most suited. Particularly true is this because many of the foreigners had no qualifications at all to speak of, and only obtained their jobs in the Soviet Union, by

sheer bluff. After all, even in my own case, a Cambridge First in Economics was not necessarily a guarantee that I should be a good teacher of the English language. And it certainly did suggest that I might say things about economics that would definitely not be consistent with Soviet views of this science! All the same, teachers of English were required—I had a university degree—I was appointed.

To-day, looking back on my first months in the U.S.S.R., I realize how exceedingly fortunate I was to start my career as a Soviet worker in the sphere of education. For, by working among students, I obtained from the first an insight into what was new in the Soviet system, and what kind of a younger generation was growing up in the new era of Five-Year Plans. In this respect I can claim to have had an experience which not a single one of our newspaper correspondents has enjoyed; and I established a contact with the rising generation which even factory workers did not have to the same extent. It has been said that a community can be judged by the way in which it cares for its children; equally true, I think, would it be to say that a community can be judged by its students. My first contact with the U.S.S.R. was with its students; and as a result I obtained first-hand contact with the new, wholly Soviet, rising generation.

From September 1931 to the end of 1932 I worked in the U. S. S. R. Then I returned to England for six months. In July 1933, having been offered a temporary job for two months in Moscow, I went back. Permanent work was offered me, and I stayed, with only one month's holiday in England till June 1936. Again, in the summer of 1937, I paid a month's visit to Leningrad and Moscow with a group of British visitors.

When I returned to England in the middle of 1936 there was one thing which I did not intend to do. This was to write a book on my "experiences" of "my life in Russia." I thought that such books had already been greatly overdone. People who lived in Russia for anything from five days to five years seemed all to write books on

their "experiences," and I did not personally feel that another such book would add anything to the violently opposed views already expressed.

But since my return to England the spate of books of the "I have lived in Russia" type has increased, not diminished. And among these books a particular tendency has become noticeable—that of the "disillusioned Communist" who, in the late 1920's or early '30's went to the U.S.S.R. to work, buoyed up by enthusiasm for the Five-Year Plan, and now professes, as a result of experiences at that time, to have been bitterly disillusioned. And it is just because I too, went to the U.S.S.R. at that time, not as a Communist but as an economist, without any illusions whatever as to what I should find in Russia, that I now write this book about my experiences, and the conclusions to which these experiences have led me.

Therefore, though in 1936 I thought I should never be guilty of adding yet another book to those that tell all about "how I lived in Russia," I now present this volume without apology. I feel that someone who went to live in the U.S.S.R. without previously having any illusions about it deserves a hearing.

## CHAPTER II

### STUDENT HOSTEL

**I**N September 1931 it was still a little daring to go to Russia. A relative even called it 'courageous' of me to go to work in Moscow. The vast influx of foreign visitors was still just beginning, and grew steadily during the following years. When I arranged to work at the Technicum of Foreign Languages as a teacher of English I was not so much interested in the work of teaching as in the people whom I was to teach, the organization of the institution in which I would work, and in general the running of the country in which I was to live. I was considerably less interested in the teaching of English as such than I had been in teaching economics in North Wales. I was also, it must be admitted, rather less qualified to teach English than to teach the economics of capitalism.

Owing to the fact that it was still a rather unusual thing to go to live in U.S.S.R. I was asked by a large number of people to write to them of my impressions. As a result I typed a series of letters (with carbon copies) during my first months in Moscow, and these were circulated to friends and relatives in Britain. Thanks to the fact that copies of these letters remain in my possession I can recapture to some extent my first impressions on arrival in the Soviet Union in 1931.

What were these first impressions? A wooden arch across a railway line laid on sand, and on the arch was inscribed the legend: "Workers of all Lands, Unite!" And then the Customs House at Stolpce, which at that time was made entirely of wood. Then, as now, it was necessary to wait quite a long time for the Moscow train. Customs officials politely but very thoroughly searched through the

baggage of each passenger. They appeared particularly interested in any printed matter, and their lengthy perusal of every illustrated magazine seemed hardly to be entirely a matter of duty. When the Customs investigation was over there was time to explore the vast waiting-room and restaurant, with a buffet and artificial palm-trees. At the buffet was some rather fly-blown food; a few people sat at tables or lounged about, and near the entrance a distinct whiff of the toilet was noticeable, guiding the foreigner who read no Russian to the right door along a corridor. A single visit to this toilet was enough to justify all the caustic comments on Soviet sanitation that have ever been made by foreigners: plugs that did not pull, plugs that did pull and pulled right off, plugs that pulled with no water to follow, overflowing fluids swamping the floor, dirty seats, and a smell apparently completely uncombated by any form of disinfectant. Such toilets, I was to find, were not uncommon throughout Soviet territory during the years 1931, 1932, 1933, and even to-day. But I was also to find that, bit by bit, here a little and there a little, steps were being taken to improve conditions. For example, in 1937 a brand-new tiled lavatory was opened in the Park of Culture and Rest in Moscow. It had Grecian columns at the entrance, and queues formed outside it on the first days after its opening. Young men came out and friends in the queue called out to them: "What's it like?" "Magnificent," came the reply. Lavatories in the U.S.S.R. have played an important part in forming the impressions of foreign visitors, and more will be said on this subject later on.

At last the train for Moscow arrived. We took our places, and in one respect, at any rate, I found travelling more pleasant than in the rest of Europe. There was room for everyone to lie down at night. The seats, however, were hard, as in Poland and Switzerland, not soft as in our trains; but compensation for this was the fact that mattresses could be hired for the night.

Before crossing the frontier I had purchased a certain

amount of food. I had anticipated high prices and even a shortage on the journey. Actually, while prices were comparatively high, the food in the dining-car proved quite palatable, and I found that I need not have bought supplies at the last stop in Poland. One thing, however, did require remedying. This was the English version of the menu in the dining-car. While the food was above my expectations the menu was certainly not. Everything was being done to make the foreigner feel at home. Therefore, every dish was described not only in Russian but in German and English as well. Reading through the English version I found it to be almost meaningless, since most of the English translations appeared to consist of a few English words together with Russian words printed in Latin script and a few German ones thrown in! My desperation reached its zenith, however, when I came upon this delightful dish, "Surgeons different."

As a potential teacher of English in the U.S.S.R. I felt that this was the signal to start work. I called the waiter, went through the menu dish by dish, and by the end had turned out something approximating to a bill of fare that any English visitor might be expected to understand. Admittedly our translations were a little clumsy in many respects: I have always felt that my erudite "Sturgeon prepared in various ways" missed something of the appetizing slickness of "Surgeons different," but at any rate it saved the naive visitor from confirming his suspicions of cannibalism on the very threshold of Soviet territory!

One of the first words that every foreigner learns in Russia is *ceychass*: which literally means 'within the hour,' is usually translated 'presently,' and in fact means some future moment when the speaker thinks fit—if he or she does not forget in the meantime! Much has been written of this Russian word *ceychass*, but not more, I think, than of the Spanish *mañana*. To the town-bred Englishman such words, indicating a vague and indefinite postponement, are exasperating. But it is not necessary to

go to Russia or to Spain to find that same spirit, that same lack of a sense of the urgency of time. Nobody who has ever travelled in the Highlands of Scotland, or in Ireland, can honestly be surprised when he is confronted, in a country with a vast peasantry, with *ceychass* or *mañana*.

The fact which we must recognize—and Englishmen abroad are notoriously unable to recognize anything that explains why foreign countries differ from their own—is that throughout the world the victory of clock-time over sun-time is not complete. In a small territory like Britain, with its hundred and fifty years of industrialism, almost everyone tells the time by the clock. The sense of time is so developed that only in places like remote parts of the Scottish Highlands and Ireland does one to-day find the lack of time-sense that is so common in Spain and Russia. In countries like Russia and Spain, however, where even to-day the vast majority of the people live by working on the soil and still measure time by the sun, the sense of the clock has still not become universal even in the towns. This is why in Russian films the movement is so often too slow for the English or American spectator while just right for the Russians. It is for the same reason that in Moscow a foreign business man may be kept waiting for days to accomplish business that, in London, he might conclude in a matter of hours. The frequent use of the term *ceychass* is a symptom that even to-day the peasant attitude to time still survives to some extent even in the towns; though in the seven years that I have known the U.S.S.R. clock-time has been making progress, and punctuality to-day is a slightly more common virtue than it was in 1931. Even to-day, however, a foreigner may be exasperated by having to wait far longer than he or she considers reasonable, polite, business-like, or 'within the hour'!

On arriving in Moscow in September 1931 I was met at the station by two students sent from the Technicum. They took me to Mrs. Borodin's office, into

which, much to the disgust of the people waiting outside, I was admitted without having to do time in the queue. I was told that 'presently' I should be taken by the students to their hostel, where it had been arranged that I should live. In the meantime an American teacher was asked to take me home for a meal, which she did. I arrived at the Technicum about 11 A.M.: I returned from lunch about 1-30: 'presently' I was to be taken to the hostel; actually I was taken there at 6-30 P.M. Already I had learnt the meaning of the word *veychass*.

Mrs. Borodin, or "Borodina," the director of the Technicum, had a small office protected from a crowded little ante-room by a glass partition. The small ante-room was always crammed with people waiting for interviews; the telephone was continually ringing, and a harassed secretary communicated with her chief through a small window in the partition which could be locked on the inside when Borodina could stand no further interruptions. If for one moment the secretary left her post as sentry, visitors not only pushed their heads through the little window till it was slammed shut and bolted on the inside, but they also would crowd into the office until Borodina, in desperation, locked the door. Having seen during my first days in Moscow, and many times since, how every Soviet official is constantly besieged with applicants for attention, I have never been one of those who grumble at the inaccessibility of more highly-placed officials in the Soviet State who are not available to be interviewed by every foreign visitor who thinks that Stalin or Kalinin might be 'democratic' enough to spare him a few minutes of private conversation!

I had been told in April when my job was arranged that I should have precisely the same conditions as Russian teachers, with the one important exception of a foreigner's ration-book. This concession was being made at the time to all 'foreign specialists' so that they should not experience too great a change from the diet to which they were accustomed in their own countries. I had also been

told that the most difficult problem of all would be to find a room. But at all costs a bed somewhere was guaranteed. When I arrived I found that no room had been found but a bed was available for me in a students' hostel, and 'presently' I was taken home to see my new quarters.

We travelled by taxi, and on arrival at the gate of the students' hostel a mysterious delay took place. The taxi was dismissed, my student companions whispered excitedly among themselves. One of them then dived into the hostel and two others and myself were left waiting on the pavement. After some time the student returned, we were told to come in, and I was taken to a room. At that time I never understood the reason for that mysterious delay. It later dawned on me that not only had no room ever been procured for me, but apparently up to my arrival there had been no bed either. I strongly suspect that during those minutes while we waited on the pavement outside the hostel our emissary hastily cleared somebody out of a bed to make room for me, and that when we entered and I found a bed available for my personal occupation, the lawful occupant had just a few minutes previously been asked to vacate it in order to make room for the new English teacher. Certainly, in our room, two brothers from the Ukraine shared a bed. I have reason to suspect that this was generosity on their part, and without it I should have been bedless. Borodina had evidently told the students to make room for me in the hostel somehow. They did so.

The students' hostel was quite a new building, covered in pale yellow plaster, six storeys high, and standing some way back from the road. At some future date there would be gardens round it, but at present it had to be approached over the roughest ground, and in the winter a pathway of planks was necessary to prevent wading through water and mud which was in some places quite a foot deep. I was taken up to the top floor (there was no lift) to a room in a corridor of some thirty similar rooms. Each room had a window the full length of the outer wall,

and five or six beds were placed round the room with one under the window. In the middle there was a table, there were a few chairs, and one large wardrobe cupboard. People kept their personal belongings in suit-cases and boxes under their beds.

At one end of our corridor was a combined lavatory and washing-room, and downstairs there was a large dining-room where three meals were served daily. About 1,000 students were housed in this hostel, all of them receiving their accommodation free of charge, together with stipends from the State, which at that time amounted to about forty or fifty roubles a month. Of this money a payment of twenty-three roubles monthly provided three meals a day served in the hostel itself, or in a dining-room close to the Technicum. Not only the students, but I myself and several other teachers living there, paid no rent.

My experiences of sanitation noted at the frontier were to some extent repeated in this hostel. The lavatory accommodation here was unique: a row of five water-closets along one wall faced a row of wash-basins along the opposite wall, with no partitions of any kind between. Both women and men students inhabited our floor, and it was usual when women were using the lavatories for them to lock the door so that no men could enter; and vice-versa. A few wooden partitions would have made all this unnecessary. It was certainly wasteful when a person of one sex using one water-closet locked the door and kept everyone from the use of the other four until he or she ultimately emerged. Not infrequently would those locked out bang upon the door. Calmly from inside a voice would say: "*Ceychass—ceychass!*"

Plumbing, too, was hardly up to the required standard. As we were on the top floor we suffered particularly in this respect, since on many occasions all the water was being drawn by the lower floors, the cisterns did not fill up as soon as they were emptied, with unsatisfactory results. And, of course,—a fact immortalized by Sir

Walter Citrine—there were no plugs in the wash-basins. In this matter, however, criticism on our part is simply a sign of our own provincialism. For, as I discovered during my stay in the U.S.S.R., the Russians have no respect for the habit of washing in standing water. Whether it is in washing their hands, or in the bath-house, the Russians make a point of pouring clean water over themselves, or getting someone else to do it; or else they wash under a running water-tap, or under a shower. To wash one's hands in standing water is considered a dirty habit, to lie in a bath of standing water is considered equally dirty unless shower is at hand to give a final syill before drying. For this reason basins without plugs are the tradition in Russia, and though a few foreigners have succeeded in getting a few plugs placed in a few baths and basins in ships and hotels, the Russian tradition of washing in running water remains, however much a handful of English and American visitors may object to always having to splash about like a sparrow in a thin trickle, not being allowed to soak their hands and bodies in deep standing water as is their custom at home.

Apart from the plumbing, the quality of the building left much to be desired. While from the outside the building looked substantial enough, inside the finish was extremely rough; the plaster-work had a rather amateurish appearance, and there was a lack of any bright-coloured paint-work. I particularly appreciated the poorness of the plastering when, one evening, part of the ceiling came down in the corridor. Soon it was repaired. Nobody besides myself seemed particularly worried at this happening in a new building, and it was only many months later that I began fully to appreciate the considerable gap in building technique between the U.S.S.R. and Britain, and consequently between the quality of work expected in the U.S.S.R. as compared with this country. I should add, however, that since 1932 the advances made in building technique surpass description. Some people, visiting the Moscow 'Underground,' comment on the 'extrava-

gance' of its decoration while many people are still badly housed. Personally, if the building of the Moscow 'Metro' were all that there is to it, I might possibly agree; but we must realize that the technical advances achieved on the 'Metro' construction are now being carried into every form of building activity, so that a really first-class piece of work like this has repercussions throughout the industry far beyond its own particular marble columns and tiled walls.

I have said that meals cost the students twenty-three roubles a month. What kind of food was supplied for these meals? Even with my own middle-class standards of feeding in England I found the food adequate in quantity though somewhat lacking in variety. From notes made at the time I reproduce a typical menu. Breakfast: most often *kasha* (the Russian equivalent of our porridge) made from barley and other grain, either boiled, fried, or with milk. As a rule, for breakfast, there would be small pieces of meat or egg mixed with this *kasha*. Or, sometimes, excellent cream cheeses would take the place of the *kasha*, or a cold herring, which had to be eaten with the fingers, since only spoons were supplied at breakfast, though knives and forks appeared at the mid-day meal! Sometimes we would have a hard-boiled egg or a 'cutlet' (a word used in the U.S.S.R. to cover practically everything similar to our rissole), and, on the worst days, simply bread and jam, or bread and butter. In addition to these things there was always a glass of well-sugared tea (except when sugar ran short and sweets took its place), unlimited black bread and a good slice of white. For mid-day dinner always broth, containing a variety of vegetables, but mainly cabbage, and sometimes made with barley; a meat course of 'cutlets' or veal, with very occasionally beef, mutton or pork; or, sometimes, a purely vegetarian dish, such as macaroni, potatoes and a hard-boiled egg; or on a very bad day, potatoes and gravy only. Supper, like breakfast, but with soup sometimes featuring as the main dish, and quite often a sweet in the form of *compôte*, which at that time in the U.S.S.R. usually consisted of

about three rather tasteless cherries swimming in some still more tasteless juice. Fresh fruit was also provided occasionally, and could be bought as an extra. From an English middle-class point of view there was a considerable lack of adequate fruit, eggs, butter or milk; while on the other hand clotted sour cream quite often appeared, either in soup or as a sweet.

The absence of knives and forks at breakfast, even when the food to be eaten took the form of a recalcitrant herring, was somewhat disturbing to a foreigner. I can imagine certain visitors to the U.S.S.R. over the past six years writing almost a whole chapter on this matter alone. In such a chapter the low cultural level of the Russians and the awful oppression of the Soviet Government would be portrayed in detail round this striking incident—the lack of a knife or fork to eat a breakfast herring in a students' hostel. This, and myriads of other deficiencies, such as those of sanitation already mentioned, have been the main theme of many books.

But why were knives and forks not served for breakfast as well as for dinner in our hostel? The answer, I think, was purely an administrative one. Since in the U.S.S.R. there was already no unemployment and the working day was limited to eight hours, most organizations were seriously understaffed. The more washing-up there was to do the more difficult became the administration of our hostel. So everyone made sacrifices as consumers to enable the strict enforcement of the eight-hour day for everyone as workers. One other observation is worth making here. The cutlery in our hostel at that time was hardly of the quality that to-day is obtained in our own Woolworth stores. I remember efforts to eat my breakfast herring with a spoon. They resulted in the spoon breaking before it had severed the herring! Here again there was an explanation. Throughout the U.S.S.R. dining-rooms and restaurants were being opened on a vast scale. The U.S.S.R. was just beginning to build up its own metal industry. The peasantry as a whole

had never used modern cutlery. The growing demand for knives, forks, and spoons was far ahead of what the metallurgical industry could adequately supply, and as a result we had a period of makeshift cutlery, some of which collapsed before making any effect on the food it was meant to cut. It is worth mentioning that, in the years that have followed, tough cutlery and tender meat have steadily replaced the tender cutlery which was often defeated by rather tough meat during the first Five-Year Plan!

It should be said here that in discussing the kind of food available in the U.S.S.R. then and now it is essential to recognize the tastes and customs of the people before passing judgment. For example, if an Englishman goes to France and demands eggs and bacon for breakfast he will be met with a blank refusal in all but the largest of the hotels which cater for foreign visitors. Yet it would hardly be correct to label the French people as starving because they do not have a bacon-and-egg breakfast like the English middle class. Similarly, visitors to the U.S.S.R. have only too frequently been horrified at the prevalence of black bread and cabbage soup in the diet of the Russians. It is usually assumed that they only eat such things because they cannot get anything better, though I know that this is not so from my own experience.

In a very short visit to the U.S.S.R., David Low appreciated this point and immortalized it in one of his cartoons, where he shows Russians actually asking for *more* cabbage soup! In my own experience I have repeatedly sat down at table with Soviet citizens and regularly chosen whatever soup was offered as an alternative to the cabbage. But I have rarely seen a Russian, when given the choice, take any soup but cabbage soup when that was available. And similarly with regard to black bread, I have found that many Russians prefer this to white, though, with a rising standard of life, it is becoming increasingly fashionable to eat white bread at the present time. This is a tendency which, from the point of view of healthy diet, is not wholly to be welcomed.

At this point I wish to quote a passage from a letter written from Moscow at the end of September 1931. For, just as it was true then, it is almost equally applicable at the present time, seven years later. I had been sent a cutting from a newspaper in which Dr. Hayden Guest made the remark that "hardly does anyone ever smile in Russia." I had seen the same statement elsewhere, and felt that this boggy at any rate could be slain outright. At that time I wrote, and I can confirm it to-day :

I can only explain this comment by the possibility that for the first time in their lives when they came to Russia these people really looked at other people's faces, and realized that when in repose the human face is rarely smiling. If you walk along Oxford Street or go to Limehouse you will notice that people only smile when they have something to smile at, and when there is nothing to smile at—for example, when sitting in buses or walking along the street—people do not smile. In Russia, as in England, people certainly do not wander about the streets grinning, but I am quite sure that they laugh as much as anyone else, and certainly the students show no less signs of being joyful and happy than students in Britain. If you could hear the laughter and singing which makes it impossible to do any work in this building except when there is nobody else in the room, you would see the absurdity of such statements that the people are solemn, strained, and never smile.

Even to-day such remarks still creep into the columns of our press, and I, therefore, feel that such a point deserves mention.

### CHAPTER III

## I WORK AS A TEACHER

I must now say something about our Technicum and its students. The Technicum of Foreign Languages in Moscow would correspond to a technical college in England, which, in addition to its classes on its own premises, sent teachers to all kinds of other organizations that wanted courses in foreign languages; it was, in fact, a centre for the co-ordinating of language teaching throughout the city. All students received their training free of charge and the full-time students were paid while studying, receiving free accommodation in the hostel.\* Most of these students were drawn from the ranks of the working population. At that time, it should be remembered, representatives of the old property-owning classes, sons and daughters of people who had been landlords and capitalists, were still disqualified from the universities and technical colleges, and on one occasion one of my students was expelled when his father was deported from his native village as a *kulak*. Most of the students had worked for a living, had studied free of charge in evening classes, and in this way had qualified for entry to the Technicum. Because they were working people and many of them from distant parts of the country, their travelling expenses were paid at vacation-time to enable them to return home without serious financial sacrifice.

In every class there were both men and women, and from the start I was impressed by the real equality which existed between the sexes, both among the students and among the teachers. The girl students took it for granted that they would all have careers, and were rather shocked

\*See note, p. 29.

to learn that in Britain many women contemplated working at a job only until marriage. And when I told them that in many English towns women are not allowed to teach after they marry they were appalled at this 'medieval custom,' and protested that it was only either very young women, or women with children of their own, who were likely to be able to establish contact with the young minds that they were supposed to teach. Among the students themselves I never ceased to notice complete equality and comradeship—this is the only word that really describes it—that everybody accepted as a matter of course. There was no segregation of the sexes as in most universities in this country. In the same hostel, in rooms on the same floor, men and women lived; with special rooms for the married couples. But I never saw any familiarity that could be frowned on even by a puritan observer. And in class there was none of that nonsense that is the tradition at Cambridge—that the men should stamp when the women enter the lecture-room; nor was there that constant flirting in the passages which had been a characteristic of college life at Bangor. In Cambridge, I believe, there is still a university lecturer who refuses to tolerate a woman in the lecture-room. Such 'barbarity' amazed the Russians when I told them of it.

Next to sex equality I was struck by the existence of real national equality. In every class there were Russians, Jews, and people of other nationalities of the U.S.S.R. In our room in the hostel (which was a random choice) we had two Ukrainian brothers, a Russian sailor, a Jew and an Armenian. The significance of the fact that Russians and Jews studied in the same classroom in Moscow and took this for granted, cannot be fully comprehended without realizing the position that existed in tsarist Russia. I only began to appreciate this personally when a Jewish woman teacher with whom I exchanged lessons described how she took her degree in St. Petersburg before the Revolution. As a Jewess, she was not allowed to live in the capital as a student, but there was a way out of the

difficulty. She had to register with the police as a prostitute, receive the 'yellow ticket,' or prostitute's passport, and under those conditions only was she able to live in the capital and study at the university. Such obscene forms of national oppression, immediately abolished by the Russian Revolution, are to-day being revived—even sometimes in more obscene forms—in Nazi Germany. In the U.S.S.R. to-day it is a criminal offence to insult anyone on the grounds of race or nationality, and a certain gentleman who some time ago told a fellow-member of Parliament to "go back to Poland" would, under Soviet law, have been subjected to criminal proceedings.

In their relations with myself and with other foreigners I never saw the slightest trace of national antagonism. People were proud of their nationality or race, whether Russian or Jewish, Armenian or Ukrainian. And foreigners were expected to be proud of their own nationality, too. The Soviet youth that I met never confused nationality with government; they always professed friendliness to the peoples of all countries, while regarding the governments of capitalist countries as potential enemies. Never did I hear a Soviet citizen say he did not 'like' "the Poles," or "the Germans," or "the Jews;" in fact, all of these generalizations about peoples and races which are so common among ourselves in Britain seemed to have become extinct. In their place was a lively interest in the lives of the working people of all countries, as distinct from their governments, and from their employers.

The organization of the students during this first year and a half that I was in the U.S.S.R. was still on rather crude collectivist lines. The students were organized into 'brigades,' and each brigade competed with the others for the best results, which fostered a very healthy team spirit. At that time, however, there was one serious weakness. While brigade competed against brigade, there was very little check on the individual progress of each student within each group. As a result, the best member of each group would usually tend to answer for the brigade as a

whole, and each group would, therefore, be marked according to the achievements of its best member. On the other hand, at the end of each term, the teacher had to give the 'characteristics'—excellent, good, fair, weak, very weak—of each student personally, and this took place in public, and the students could say whether they approved or disapproved of the teacher's summing-up of their merits.

In the past few years drastic steps have been taken by the Soviet educational authorities to put an end to that loose collectivism in which the individual achievements of all but one or two students escaped close attention. To-day in every Soviet educational institution, while brigades still compete for the best results, and while class competes against class for the greatest number of 'excellents' and 'goods' and a minimum of 'weak,' the maximum incentive is given to each individual to produce good results, and no teacher is allowed to let one student be the single spokesman for a group.\* In group-consciousness there has been no decline, for every class in every Soviet educational institution is competing against other classes for the best results. It is thus in the interest of all members of a Soviet class to help the weakest members to get better results in order to increase the achievements of the class as a whole. We have in this way an atmosphere more like that of an English football field than of an English class-room. On the other hand, every student must now stand on his or her own feet, and not rely on the good answers given on his or her behalf by somebody else. This entirely sane and necessary development has been heralded in some quarters as a return to "tsarist educational methods." Nothing could be farther from the truth. But it must be recognized that the new system does recognize the rôle of the individual within the group, whereas the previous method tended to regard only the group and to ignore the individual. This atten-

\*See Note, p. 29.

tion to individual achievement in education is symptomatic of a general tendency during the past few years in the U.S.S.R. A tendency to care for every individual and every individual's achievement within the group achievements; whereas at an earlier stage, during the elimination of private enterprise in the years preceding 1928, it was the masses as such, rather than the masses as aggregates of individuals, which were the centre of emphasis.

My particular job during this period was to give the students practical experience in the use of English. Already, in their second term, they began to have conversation lessons; and I, at that time still knowing very little Russian, conducted the classes entirely in English. I was amazed at the way in which these young Soviet citizens, mostly with illiterate parents and a background of the most elementary education, were able to start speaking in a completely foreign language during their second term at college. And it was not as if they had been spending all their time learning the language, because even in a school of languages the number of other subjects taught in the U.S.S.R. is always sufficient to give an adequate general education as well as a specialized one. These students specializing on languages obtained a much fuller general education than I did in Cambridge, where I specialized in economics and never touched on any other subject.

André Gide, commenting on the learning of languages in the U.S.S.R., writes as follows:

Every student is obliged to learn a foreign language. French has been completely abandoned. It is English, and especially German, that they are supposed to know. I expressed my surprise that they should speak them so badly; in our countries a fifth-form schoolboy knows more.

One of the students we questioned gave us the following explanation (in Russian, and Jef Last translated it for us): "A few years ago Germany and the United States still had something to teach us on a few points. But now we have nothing more to learn from foreigners. So why should we speak their language?"<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> André Gide, *Back from the U.S.S.R.* (Secker & Warburg), p. 48.

This was quoted by Gide as evidence of a "kind of *superiority complex*" developing in the U.S.S.R.

Now I do not know exactly the type of student with whom André Gide had this conversation. I do not know to what extent the translation of Jef Last and the memory of André Gide have distorted the original. But I do know, first, from my own experience, that the powers shown by young Russians to learn English in a few months surpassed anything I have seen in England where young people have studied foreign languages. When André Gide compares the U.S.S.R. unfavourably with "our countries" in this respect—whatever may be the position in France—it could only be ignorance that led him to include England if he meant to do so. Secondly, I know that young people in the U.S.S.R. who specialize in languages usually have some object in view. It is not customary for students in any country, unless they are endowed with an unearned income, to choose their subjects quite apart from their future careers. During the first Five-Year Plan there were a large number of jobs for translators and interpreters, especially in English and German, because this was important to the technical development of the country. But this particular need began steadily to decline after 1933, and students then proposing to study languages for their future careers did so mainly in order to become teachers. A young engineering student might, in these circumstances, quite justifiably have spoken as Gide describes with regard to his own less urgent need to study languages to-day as compared with several years previously.

When Gide says that "French has been completely abandoned" he is again falling into false exaggeration. It is perfectly true that French ceased after the Revolution to be the first foreign language taught in the schools; German and English tended to take its place. But it was not, and has never been, completely abandoned. It is quite natural in any country that the main foreign languages learnt at any time should be those of the greatest practical

use. In tsarist Russia French was fashionable at Court, and the tastes of the Court considerably influenced the educational system. Since the Revolution far more practical assistance has been needed by the U.S.S.R. from the great industrial countries of America and Germany. As a result the English and German languages became popular. André Gide's student was probably only stating this truth, to the effect that they no longer needed the technical help from America and Germany that they had previously required, and, therefore, it was no longer so necessary as it had been that people should qualify in these languages as translators and interpreters.

To suggest, however, that the Soviet students' *only* interest in foreign languages is purely material, with a view to a job, would be utterly false. In my own experience I met student after student who, when the purely technical work of learning was finished for the day, sat down to read some book in a foreign language, usually some classic, purely for the joy of reading literature in a foreign tongue. When, again, we recall that these students are mainly drawn from the working masses of the population, we can only be impressed at their eagerness to learn.

Throughout Soviet education I found that great emphasis was laid on practical as well as theoretical study. In the sphere of languages this took the form of conversation classes, and in mine all the proceedings took place in English. While I was personally not so interested in teaching English from the linguistic point of view, these conversation lessons were of the greatest interest, for it was possible to discuss all kinds of questions of a political, economic and social character. One fact, however, repeatedly struck me from the first, it was extremely hard to discover anything controversial about which to hold a discussion, because, on all major questions, there was apparently complete agreement. Was this the result of a ruthless dictatorship from above, or was it a reflection of the actual conditions of life in which there no longer

were any major issues dividing people against each other? Of this more will be said anon.

It seems to be generally believed in this country—and certain visitors to the U.S.S.R. have done a great deal to further the acceptance of this view—that the Soviet citizen has an excessively unfavourable impression of living conditions in other countries while overestimating the joys of life in the U.S.S.R. I had ample opportunity to test such a view in my conversations with students. My general impression was, from the very first, that there was very little misconception on their part as to conditions abroad. Here, again, let me quote from a letter written at the end of September 1931:

One of the most satisfactory conversation lessons was when I asked the students each to speak on a comparison of conditions here and abroad. In this discussion, to which I personally contributed nothing, some interesting differences of opinion occurred. For example, one girl said that it was easier to get an education abroad because here it was only easy if one was a member of the working class. This was severely criticized by the rest of the group, who rightly pointed out that it was very hard for the members of the working class to get educated elsewhere, and as they constituted the majority of the population this was the better country in that respect. Very little emphasis was laid on the standard of life anywhere, but it was emphatically pointed out that the working man in capitalist countries could be sacked at the whim of an employer whereas here this was not so. Considerable emphasis, of course, was laid on the present crisis.

In general, during my stay in the U.S.S.R. I did not find any tendency to think that, in every respect, the U.S.S.R. was better off than other countries. Rather I found genuine puzzlement on the part of Soviet citizens as to why, in technically advanced countries, there should be such a scourge as unemployment. Time and again when working in Moscow, and later when travelling, I was asked whether it was true, as the press reported, that there were bread queues in New York while grain was being deliberately destroyed. Such reports in the Soviet press appeared almost incredible to the readers; for this happened

at the same time as the U.S.A. was being given constant publicity as the country most advanced technically. The ordinary Soviet citizen could not understand why a technically advanced country should have unemployment and hunger, and should deliberately destroy food. Comparing the press of both countries, I am convinced that the people of the U.S.S.R. as a whole get a completer view of world affairs outside their own country than the people of other countries are able to do at the present time.

In comparison with Cambridge and Bangor, both the students and teachers in Moscow played a far more active part in running their educational institution than I had ever imagined possible. Both at the Technicum and the Institute of Modern Languages at which I taught later periodical meetings of students and teachers would be held to discuss the work of the institution. I remember one meeting where the director made a long speech on the weaknesses in our work, then teachers contributed their opinions, and students also. In this way, in an atmosphere of frank discussion, questions were thrashed out concerning our work. The director did not hesitate to criticize teachers and students; the students did not hesitate to criticize the administration and the teachers; and the teachers freely criticized administration and students. In addition to such general meetings, the students and teachers of each group used frequently to discuss the progress of their work, and if students did not like a particular teacher they asked for his or her removal. On a number of occasions the students went to the management and said that a certain teacher was not interesting, had not the right approach to the students, or was in some other way unsuitable. In Soviet institutions, I found, the teacher was not considered infallible; I wondered how many of our Cambridge or Bangor lecturers could have stood the test of criticism by the students that we experienced in Moscow!

Everyone in a Soviet higher educational institution is organized in a trade union. There is a union for the

students and one for the teachers. And it is the trade union which organizes periodical meetings to discuss the work of the organization. Then, in addition, a considerable number of our students were members of the Kom-somol, or Young Communist League, and some teachers and some students were members of the Communist Party. No distinction of any kind was made between the party and non-party students and teachers, except that the former, in addition to their regular work, had their party meetings, and at these meetings the affairs of the institution, as well as political and national questions, were discussed. It was the job of the party group in our organization to provide a satisfactory lead in all general meetings, and I found that as a rule party members were regarded with the greatest respect, as being the most active and most conscientious of our fellow-workers.

Besides meetings, at which the affairs of the institution were discussed, a powerful weapon of criticism was the 'wall-newspaper,' in which each class and the students as a whole wrote their views on both political and local issues. In the Soviet 'wall-newspaper'—which hangs on the wall like a glorified notice-board, with articles written by all members of the organization who have anything to say—lies a powerful weapon against bureaucracy. And, in contrast with Bangor where I had previously taught, I found that the students were fully permitted to discuss both political questions and the merits of their various teachers in this paper. An interesting contrast, by the way, with Bangor; for at this time a whole issue of the college magazine which had dared to depart from the traditional contents, consisting mainly of trivial anecdotes, had been banned because it dealt with major political problems of the day! In Moscow, I found, it was considered not only desirable but necessary that students should express their views on current political questions, and that they should also voice their feelings on the running of their school and the merits of their teachers. The kind of thing which was not allowed to be discussed in a British

university's student magazine appeared to be the main subject matter of the 'wall-newspapers' of Moscow.

As a teacher, with both full-time students and a number of evening classes, I met a considerable variety of people as students. In the Technicum I had the ordinary full-time student drawn from the ranks of the workers and peasants; in evening classes I taught office-workers, so that I met a rather more representative variety of citizens than either a worker in a factory, on the one hand, or a foreign newspaper correspondent on the other.

In personal contact with the different types of students I found that they had one thing in common which I had never found in Britain. This was a sense of common ownership of their whole country, its fields and factories, its shops, and its places of recreation. In discussing the Five-Year Plan, the building of the great Dnieprostroi dam, the collectivization of agriculture, my students spoke of what "we" were doing with "our" country. They seemed to be as personally interested in the building of Dnieprostroi as an Englishman is in laying out his garden. But this sense of the common ownership of the country certainly varied in degree from person to person. The ordinary worker and peasant students, I found, took the Soviet system for granted as their own. But a certain number of my students in the evening classes, many of whom were office workers, still clearly harboured longings for a Paris or a London in which the old superior status of the office-worker remained, and where they could still fancy that the manual workers were their natural inferiors. To these, the government was often "they," not "we."

When I returned to London in 1936 I happened to visit Cambridge, where I had a conversation with an economist of world renown. This was at the time of the trial of Kamenev and Zinoviev. "There's nothing left of the Revolution in Russia now," he said, "they're just building factories. There's nothing revolutionary in building and running factories." Apparently to this eminent economist the only way to continue the revolu-

tion was to have permanent civil war! But something far more revolutionary than civil war had occurred in Russia. For I found in Moscow that every university student to some extent felt that he or she was contributing to the building and the running of the new factories and that these factories were "ours," "our very own." This was the essence of the Revolution as I discovered it during my first few months in Moscow. The people regarded the land and the factories as theirs, they regarded the government as "our" government, which administered "our" affairs. They discussed the Five-Year Plan of economic development as if this was as much a personal matter as the building of their own private house. The civil war was over, and what remained was the sense of ownership by the masses of the people of a country covering one-sixth of the world's surface.

\* NOTE TO 1943 EDITION

Under a more recent decree, State stipends are no longer paid unconditionally to senior secondary and university students. To-day, to obtain free university education students must achieve a certain standard of excellence in their work. If, for any period, they fall below this standard, then they must pay a small fee for the time being.

All discharged Red army soldiers can receive a university education completely free of charge, so long as they can pass the entrance examinations.

## CHAPTER IV

### ROOM OF MY OWN

**I** lived in the students' hostel for two months. But it did not agree with me. With my own personal background—having been brought up to enjoy a certain amount of privacy, with a room to myself—life in a small room with five other people became too difficult. I wanted a room. In every conversation lesson, when I wanted to give an example, I found myself automatically inventing sentences all of which centred round the one great problem: a room of my own! In feeling the need for a single room I was experiencing something that was not felt at any rate to anything like the same degree, by my Soviet room-mates. The Dean of Canterbury tells a story of how in one hotel he asked his guide how she liked her room. "It's too big," she replied. As she had just said it was like the one the Dean himself occupied, and as this room was not, in the Dean's view, at all large, he asked her what she meant. "Oh, well," was the reply, "it would be all right if there were three or four of us in it."

Always remember in considering Russian housing standards that the norm of housing to-day as before the Revolution is the peasant's small wooden cottage; and in such cottages while there may be one or two rooms there is never privacy in our sense, and there is no desire for such privacy. As housing increases such an appreciation of privacy will develop; but in no country has it ever developed before the economic possibilities were available for providing more space for living. In the meantime most of the students with whom I shared would certainly have felt acutely lonely if living on their own. I did not

feel like this, and a crisis came one night when, arriving home about midnight, I found the room in intense heat—there was very good central heating—and the windows all shut. On asking why nobody would open the window I was told that the sailor had got influenza, had a temperature, and demanded that the window be kept closed. I protested, gave a lecture on the desirability of fresh air in the struggle against 'flu germs, and threatened the whole lot with 'flu if they did not at once let some fresh air into the room. Unfortunately everybody preferred to defend the patient's view rather than accept mine, and in the end I moved into another room where someone, generous as usual, agreed to swap beds with me. I warned him of the 'flu germs, but this did not cause him the slightest distress. Nor, I believe, did any of them get 'flu. So I inserted an advertisement in the Moscow evening paper, and after much waiting moved to another part of Moscow, to a room of my own.

My landlady was a cashier in a hairdresser's shop—one of the shops belonging to the Moscow Hairdressing Trust. She earned about 150 roubles a month, and had two rooms of a three-roomed flat, with the use of the kitchen and lavatory. The third room was occupied by a man on an old-age pension who professed to be a teacher of English—but never, in the course of nearly a year, did he dare to try his English in my presence. Besides my landlady, there were her daughter and her mother. Of the three, two slept in the largest room and one in the kitchen, peasant-fashion, on a mattress laid on an enormous wooden chest. To enter my room I had to pass through their room—one of the facts of life to which one has to become acclimatized as a lodger in Moscow, and will have to for many years to come.

The extent of the housing shortage may be illustrated not only by the dearth of living quarters but of accommodation for our educational work as well. Though our Technicum had its own premises most of my evening classes were taken in all kinds of places. As every edu-

cational institution lacked the full number of class-rooms that it required it was usual after office hours to take over various public buildings for our own purposes. A great deal of my teaching work was undertaken in the building of the Commissariat of Education after office hours were over, and I also had classes in various other public offices. As Soviet office hours usually finish at 5 or 5-30 o'clock, this was possible; but sometimes if people were working late or had some kind of meeting after work was over, the arrival of our teachers and students was not altogether welcome.

At that time, while housing was in general even a slightly more acute problem than it is now, the foreigner with a foreign specialist's ration-book was a much sought-after tenant. It was usual to pay a rent of about 100 roubles a month, though no written agreement would ever be signed to that effect. In addition the landlady would take charge of the ration-book and do the shopping for the tenant and for herself, and obtain anything extra she could, such as English lessons for the daughter, for example. I moved out of this room some ten months later when I nearly lost my ration-book altogether, due to the fact that my landlady or her sister—as both denied it, I never discovered who was really responsible—had been rubbing out the entries which were made in pencil, and helping themselves again and again to extra supplies. It was a very expedient thing for them to do in the circumstances, but I hardly felt that it was worth jeopardizing my rations by running such risks, particularly as they already obtained a considerable supply of products that I did not personally require.

No written agreement was ever signed with regard to such rooms owing to the fact that to let a room for rent is 'speculation,' and any person doing this, legally speaking, was guilty of a criminal offence. However, owing to the tremendous problem of finding housing accommodation for everyone in Moscow, a certain amount of 'speculation' of this kind was winked at, while the rent

charged to the householder was considerably increased if a lodger was present. One device sometimes used by the local authorities was simply to confiscate any rooms that people might let on the ground that they obviously had enough space for themselves anyway. Such is one of the acute problems of the transition from capitalism to socialism in a country with a housing shortage.

In my new lodgings I saw something of the struggle which was going on between the younger generation and the older people who did not approve of the Soviet system. My landlady was not of working-class origin and, therefore, was extremely vague in conversation as to what her antecedents were. She was personally not too well disposed towards the Soviet government, for to her the government was "they" not "we." She often told me how much better life had been "before," though it was never quite clear whether this referred to a few years previously or before the Revolution. She usually hoped to indicate both, I think, but when pressed to be precise failed completely. The daughter, aged about fifteen, went regularly to school. It was part of my arrangement that, in addition to the exorbitant rent which I had to pay, I was to give her lessons in English. This has borne fruit, for she is now a fully-fledged student in the Moscow Institute of Modern Languages, paid by the State while studying, and in this way contributing to the family income. At the same time this ambitious mother made her daughter have music lessons, and for ten months I used to hear the same tune, somebody's Turkish march, hammered out in the next room whenever the girl was home from school. She also learnt German, but she proved most able at English. The music lessons by now, I hope, have been finally abandoned.

Serious conflicts often took place between mother and daughter. A crisis developed at Easter 1932 when the mother dyed some eggs for breakfast. The daughter, having gradually been making up her mind that she did not believe in God, refused to eat one of these eggs, and

the atmosphere was strained for several days. I believe it was about this time that she also refused to be taken to church, leading to another family crisis.

As far as I could see the conflict within the family took very much the same form that similar conflicts take in this country at some stage when children are growing up and feel that they must assert their independence. My landlady was the worst type of mother to face such a conflict as she could not yield anything to her daughter without a great deal of nagging. However, in this respect the daughter was probably well-off compared with a similar child waging a similar struggle for emancipation in this country, in that she had the whole of society with her and the community of the school gave her a strong moral backing against the domination of the mother. As far as I know, once the mother had recognized her daughter's right to an independent life, things improved, and family relations became much more friendly again.

In a letter written in February 1932 I reproduced the kind of three-cornered argument concerning living conditions that was very prevalent in that and many other families during this period. On the one hand there was my landlady, a person who, I think, would have been rather embittered under any regime; and on the other hand, her daughter. And in between, more or less keeping the balance, was the grandmother. This conversation took place in the month of February, always a bad time of year as far as food products are concerned in every country. In Britain, however, the greater scarcity simply shows itself in rather higher prices. In Moscow at that time it took the form of a complete disappearance of certain products from the market for days at a time. It was on one of these days when things that we urgently wanted were not on sale that the following conversation took place. I reproduce it word for word from a letter written at the time :

LANDLADY : I went to the shop to-day—no cheese, no eggs. Life gets worse and worse. Before, we could buy everything,

now nothing.

MYSELF (*nods sympathetically*): Indeed.

LANDLADY: Before the Revolution there were fruit, cakes, everything. . . and look at the peasants. I know one who is only allowed 100 grams of sugar. Oh, life is bad.

[*At this stage the daughter, who has been asleep, is wakened by the talking. She is post-Revolution, born in 1917.*]

DAUGHTER: No, mama, no; it's not true. Things were not better before. The workers and peasants couldn't have these things. They worked sixteen hours, they had bad houses . . . (*etc., etc.*)

LANDLADY: You be quiet; you weren't there—you don't know.

DAUGHTER: Yes, I do, you've forgotten.

LANDLADY (*turning to me again*): In the shops there were beautiful things . . .

DAUGHTER: Yes, but you couldn't buy them; only the *bourgeoisie* could buy them.

LANDLADY (*on a new tack*): Why is it like this? The newspapers are full of construction, construction, construction. Why is there nothing? We build factories, but we have nothing to eat.

GRANDMA (*intervening for first time*): But you can't do both things at once, build factories and supply all the other things.

LANDLADY: Ah, she's been talked to by my brother (he's in the Party) and now she's becoming a Communist. (*On another tack again*). And look at all the engineers that there are now. I could even be a doctor in three years while before it was necessary to study for six, and if you study for three you can be an engineer . . . If you can mend a bell you can call yourself an electrical engineer. And the schools are bad; the children don't learn to write even . . .

DAUGHTER: It's not true, everyone can now go to school, while before, the workers and peasants weren't able to.

LANDLADY: Oh, that's what they tell you at school. You don't remember.

MYSELF: But they cannot do everything perfectly at once, can they? It's necessary to build the factories in order to produce more, and to teach everyone a little, before there are enough teachers to give everyone a good education.

[*Applause from Grandma and Daughter.*]

LANDLADY: It get's worse and worse.

GRANDMA, DAUGHTER and MYSELF: But it will get better.

LANDLADY: Yes, when we are all dead.

An interesting commentary on this conversation is the fact that, in 1937 when I was back in Moscow, I visited

this family again. The mother told me how well they were now living: the daughter was receiving a stipend at the university, and things were improving from month to month. I need hardly say that I did not remind her of her attitude in 1932!

Such conversations as this, occurring often enough at that time, could easily be used unscrupulously by a hostile reporter. The essential fact was that even in this small family opinions were divided. The mother in this family certainly judged things from middle-class standards. The fact that she paid money in order to have a music teacher and a German teacher for her daughter shows that not only as compared with the Russian worker but even with the contemporary British worker, she had middle-class standards and ambitions. As we get closer to the working people the actual achievements of the Revolution were more clearly appreciated and the sacrifices of the first Five-Year Plan more readily undertaken.

It might be thought that when the landlady's daughter calmly told her how the workers and peasants lived before the Revolution this was just the result of 'propaganda' absorbed at school. Perhaps it was, but, I have made extensive inquiries since that time as to how the mass of the people actually did live in tsarist Russia, and I can confidently say that nowhere in the U.S.S.R. did I find people presenting tsarist conditions in an unduly unfavourable light. Quite the reverse. It was not on Soviet territory but in Britain that I learnt how bad conditions had been under tsarism. I learnt from reading books published before the Revolution, and from meeting people who had lived in tsarist and not in Soviet Russia. Never during the whole of the time that I lived in the U.S.S.R. did any feature of Soviet life, even in the very difficult years of 1932 and 1933, show up in any way but favourably compared with what I have since read of the pre-Revolutionary era. My landlady's daughter pointed this out on the basis of what she learnt at school. Her grandmother confirmed what she said. Her mother

as a rule condemned the Soviet system on the grounds of her very serious housekeeping difficulties in the years 1932 and 1933, but even she, when pressed to discuss education and health services, working hours and social insurance, was obliged to admit that considerable progress had been achieved.

Now during the years 1929 to 1933 the standard of consumption, certainly of food, was undoubtedly lower than in the years immediately preceding, though I never found anyone who seriously maintained that it was worse than under tsarism. I remember a scene in a play at that time in which a town-dweller asks some peasants how they are living: "Badly, very badly," they said. "Worse than last year?"—"Yes," came the reply. "Worse than the year before that?"—"Yes," again came the answer. "Worse than tsarism?"—"Oh, come now, you know nobody could live under tsarism!" And this conversation in a Soviet play reflected very vividly the feeling then current among the mass of the people.

• But while the level of consumption was in a number of respects lower than in previous years, the morale of the people remained at a high level. Though we all complained—though my personal desire for a room completely dominated my conversation for a while—we did not resent the shortages to which we were subject because we knew that the only solution lay in our own work to raise production. When Eugene Lyons, in *Assignment in Utopia*, says that no Soviet citizen during this period was interested in the Plan but only in obtaining a little more food or a pair of boots, he misses the point. It is perfectly clear that our minds were dominated by such things. But we knew that only by raising production could we satisfy our needs and that there was no other way of doing it. That is why the figures of the first Five-Year Plan were a very real promise of future benefits; and the amount of sacrifice people will undergo in their own interests is vastly greater than the sacrifice they will undertake for somebody else. The working people in the U.S.S.R. regarded

the Five-Year Plan as the business man regards his business. "Of course," said Stalin to Roy Howard, "in order to build something new one must economize, accumulate resources, reduce one's consumption for the time, and borrow from others. If one wants to build a house one saves up money, cuts down consumption for a time, otherwise the house would never be built. How much more true is this when it is a matter of building a new human society? We had to cut down consumption somewhat for a time, collect the necessary resources, and exert great effort."<sup>1</sup>

While there was a real food shortage during these years due to the rapid introduction of collective farming (of which more will be said later), the general impression of shortage was far greater than the actual situation justified. My landlady, for example, would bitterly complain that she could not buy a new pair of shoes. For days on end she would go to the shops in the early hours, wait in a queue, and even then the stock was sold out by the time she reached the counter. Yet figures showed that over seventy million pairs of leather footwear were being produced annually as compared with some twenty million before the Revolution. The boot and shoe shortage went with a vastly increased production. But whereas before 1917 tens of millions of peasants had worn the traditional sandals of plaited birch bark, to-day they were becoming conscious of the need for modern footwear and were buying it. For my landlady, for myself, and for every person who had previously had the resources to buy boots and shoes when we wanted this period was one of the most intense discomfort. To us it meant a fall in our standard of life to have to queue up for a pair of shoes, but for those who had never worn leather footwear at all the achievement of the ownership of such things, even at the cost of queuing up, was a step forward. It was these people, the vast mass of the population, that carried the country through the first Five-Year Plan, while grumbling

<sup>1</sup> *Soviet Union* 1936 (Lawrence & Wishart), p. 55.

as much as anyone at the temporary difficulties. But to some people, mainly the old middle-class people and many of the intellectuals, the difficulties of life were so great that some of them resolved at all costs and by any possible means to overthrow the Government.

Another characteristic example of shortage at this time was that of soap. It was almost impossible to walk into a shop and buy a piece of soap. The stocks were bought up as soon as they arrived. But when I visited the public bath-house I used to be surprised to see soap being used with a lavishness that it would be hard to find in Britain. The Russian enjoys his bath. In huge chambers, with rows of benches, he will spend several hours, lathering and re-lathering, and sweating it off in a steamy room just next to the boiler. At the very time that it seemed impossible to walk into a shop and find a cake of soap scores of Russians were lathering themselves time and time again in these steamy bath-houses. I am convinced that the bathing habit was on the increase and not on the decline during that period. Figures show that the production of soap increased considerably. But a rapidly rising demand, if not met by an equally rapid increase in supply, creates a 'shortage,' with the result that all who had previously been free to purchase soap whenever they wanted were furious at the shortage of soap and resented the sacrifice.

It was through seeing things in use on a vast scale of which there appeared to be the most acute shortage that I began to realize that the progress of the U.S.S.R. was not to be judged by what I personally felt, or what my landlady felt, or what a foreign correspondent like Eugene Lyons or Malcolm Muggeridge felt about the conditions of life. Against every difficulty which faced us personally we had to balance the slow advance in the standard of life of millions. Twice as much soap as is used by 100,000 people in a daily hot bath will give two million people a good hot bath once in ten days. To the hundred thousand, which included myself and my landlady, the vast increase

in mass consumption caused acute sacrifice. To the millions who were becoming accustomed to the use of soap, however, this denoted a step forward in living and cultural standards. Our comprehension of the U.S.S.R. depends always on the way we look at things: from below upwards, or from the 'upper tenth' down.

## CHAPTER V

### SOVIET FAMILY

SOON after moving into a room of my own I was sent a newspaper cutting from London, from the *Daily Mail*. This cutting read as follows:

Here, as everywhere in Russia, it was evident that family life, as we know it, had been abolished. *The mothers all work in the factories for seven or eight hours a day and their children spend their time in large kindergartens, being trained from babyhood in the elementary principles of Bolshevism. At every Soviet nursery we visited the smallest children were invariably paraded to sing Red choruses for our edification.*

In my comment on this cutting at the time I pointed out that it gave the impression that in England women with children never worked, and that the children are well cared for when their mothers do work. Now it is true that more women work in the U.S.S.R. than in Britain. According to the latest figures some 35 per cent of the occupied population in the U.S.S.R. are women, whereas in Britain the corresponding figure is 28 per cent. Considering the fuss that is made by visitors, however, we should expect that the number of women working in the U.S.S.R. was considerably more in excess of the British figure than it actually is, and when we ask how many of these working women in Britain have anywhere to leave their children when they are at work the answer is almost always that they have nowhere\*. It is a fact that in many towns in Britain to-day there is only a single nursery school, if that, and this is often reserved for the illegitimate children of the area because their "mothers must work to keep them!". In the U.S.S.R., on the other hand, the overwhelming

\* See Note, p. 51.

majority of working women know that their children, none of whom are illegitimate, are in good hands while they are at work, and it is not a question of giving little Jenny from down the road a few pence to take out the baby while mother is away. A direct reflection of this situation is the fact that, in my own experience, I have been shocked on returning to London after living in Moscow to see so many dirty children playing in the streets. In Moscow I have never seen children looking so uncared for as I can see any day in working-class district of London. Where is the family broken up? In a country where 35 per cent of the working population consists of women and where there are kindergartens and nursery schools for the overwhelming majority of their children while they are at work, or a country where 28 per cent of the working population consists of women and where it is only in exceptional cases that there is any kind of crèche or kindergarten available to care for their children? I personally feel that family relationships are likely to be better in the U.S.S.R. where almost every mother has the same opportunity of having her children well cared for during the day as the well-to-do mothers enjoy in Britain when they can afford a nurse.

I am rather amused by the fact that it is precisely that class in British society who can afford to pay nursemaids to look after their children who talk most about the glories of family life. In my own youth a paid nurse looked after me from morn till night and my parents saw me just that hour or two during the day that it gave them pleasure to see me. A family is indeed a pleasurable thing to parents who can pay somebody else to do all the drudgery and uninteresting domestic work, but it is not so much fun for the working-class housewife at any time, and still less if she has to work for at least eight hours a day in addition. In the U.S.S.R. the working day is eight hours at the maximum, whereas in Britain a working woman may have to work for far longer than this, and hardly ever see her own children except to do work for them.

"Ah," the reader may say, "but how about all this easy divorce that we hear so much about in the U.S.S.R. ? Does not that lead to promiscuity and the break-up of the family ?"

Now the marriage laws of the U.S.S.R. are based on the idea that if people do not love one another they should not be compelled to live together. I know that this is considered in certain circles to spell disaster for marriage as an institution; but if this is so, then all that has ever been written about marriage being based on love can go into the waste-paper basket once and for all. For it happens, strangely enough, that in the U.S.S.R. marriage is considered as an institution that ought to be founded on human love and not on legal and economic compulsion. Women have equal rights with men, equal pay for equal work, paid holidays for six weeks before and six weeks after childbirth, illegitimacy has been abolished, and every father is bound by law to contribute a part of his earnings to the mother of his child, whether he lives with her or not. And in the U.S.S.R. it is considered that these facts save women, for the first time in history from bargaining away their personal freedom for the economic security that, too often, is obtained in our country only by marriage.

Does such a system, the abolition of illegitimacy, the encouragement of motherhood, and the easiness of divorce, lead to a degeneration into sexual promiscuity ? I very much doubt it. I very much doubt if the younger generation in the U.S.S.R. is any more promiscuous than the younger generation in Britain; but there is this difference. In the U.S.S.R. every young woman is self-supporting, is free from the danger of unemployment, and has no need to seek a husband in order to find economic security. Such a race of young women are less likely, not more likely, to give themselves to men from economic motives. This reflects itself to-day in the U.S.S.R. in the decline of prostitution. It is impossible in the centre of London for a man to walk home at night without the likelihood

that he will be accosted, "Hullo, darling," from the shadow of some door or even openly on the pavement. I know that when I made this statement on one occasion in a provincial town I was flatly told I was lying by a certain lady in the audience. If my readers disbelieve me let them take a walk after 11 p.m. through Piccadilly, Leicester Square and Regent Street any evening and they will find that I am right. And in their own provincial towns, if they go to the corresponding streets they will find the same. In Moscow, in sharp contrast with this country, I have been out of doors at all hours of the evening and never once have I been accosted in the streets.

I will not say, however, that prostitution in the U.S.S.R. has already been completely abolished. It is estimated that Moscow to-day has some 400 prostitutes as compared with 20,000 before the Revolution. During the years of scarcity a refined sort of prostitution, particularly with foreign visitors, still continued. On one occasion I was in a room in one of Moscow's largest hotels catering for foreigners. The 'phone rang: "Hullo," said a woman's voice in English, "does Mr. Smith live there?" "No," I replied. The question was repeated twice. Rather annoyed I said, "Who's there; what do you want?" "This is a Russian lady who speaks English," came the reply. I replied that I was the G.P.U. and put down the receiver. Such incidents as this may still occur, but prostitution on the mass scale on which it exists in London and Paris, Berlin, and Tokio, has already been wiped out. And as the standard of living rises I am convinced that not only all traces of prostitution, but of marriages of convenience—which, after all, are the same thing clothed in a more respectable garb—will disappear completely.

It is worth remarking that, on this question, Frederick Engels (co-founder of Communism with Karl Marx) did not anticipate an *immediate* transformation of human morals the moment the revolution took place.

What we may anticipate about the adjustment of sexual relations after the impending downfall of capitalist production is

mainly of a negative nature and mostly confined to elements that will disappear. But what will be added? That will be decided after a new generation has come to maturity: a race of men who never in their lives have had any occasion for buying with money or other economic means of power the surrender of a woman; a race of women who have never had any occasion for surrendering to any man for any other reason but love, or for refusing to surrender to their lover from fear of economic consequences. Once such people are in the world they will not give a moment's thought to what we to-day believe should be their course. They will follow their own practice and fashion their own public opinion about the individual practice of every person—only this and nothing more.<sup>1</sup>

Has this situation been reached yet in the U.S.S.R.? No, certainly not. Have gigantic strides been already made towards this new state of society and of marriage? Yes, they have. While on the one hand there may still be isolated cases of prostitution in the U.S.S.R. and of marriages of convenience, on the other hand no woman in the U.S.S.R. to-day is forced into prostitution or into marriage as the only means of achieving a livelihood. This is the fundamental distinction between the position of the sexes in the U.S.S.R. and in other countries. A secondary difference, but of great importance, lies in the fact that in the U.S.S.R. no woman is penalized for bearing a child, but, on the contrary, receives a number of privileges as a result. Maternity, as such, is honoured; whereas in our own country maternity outside wedlock is still despised, and the mother and child persecuted as a result.

When Engels, writing in 1884, referred to the people of that future society as bound to "follow their own practice and fashion their own public opinion about the individual practice of every person" he did not go into details as to how this would be done. To-day, in the U.S.S.R., public opinion is being fashioned. I remember how, on one occasion, I returned home late at night to find a 'Comradely Court' in session on the stairs of our block of flats. A

<sup>1</sup> Engels, *Origin of the Family* (Kerr), p. 100.

meeting of the inhabitants of the house was passing judgment on a certain neighbour who, in a fit of drunkenness, had assaulted a neighbour. The man was publicly reprimanded before all the inhabitants of the block, and there the matter ended. Similar steps are taken in houses and factories to deal with domestic quarrels when they show signs of reaching a magnitude consistent in our country with taking them before a magistrate. On a recent occasion in Moscow a woman with a young child murdered her husband out of jealousy. He had given her good cause for jealousy. She killed him. She was brought up before the Moscow court. The court decided that this woman had an excellent record, both in her home life and in her work. She had met with serious provocation and had committed a very serious offence. If this woman were now isolated from society it was not likely in any way to improve her as a citizen. It was decided that she should remain at her job, while her trade union was asked to pay special attention to her to see that she should find a way of reorganizing her life satisfactorily. The experiment, I understand, proved a complete success.

It may appear somewhat strange to a reader in Britain to hear that in the U.S.S.R. the trade union to which a murderess happened to belong was entrusted by a court of law to take care of her character in the future. Such things do not happen in this country! But under Soviet conditions, where the trade unions are the largest mass organization of town-dwellers and where they play an active and positive part in running the life of the community, such a function, that of moral supervision of their members, is quite normal. It is the task of the Soviet trade unions not only to care for the interests of their members by controlling the social insurance funds put at their disposal by the State, or ensuring that the safety regulations in the factories are applied adequately, but in every sphere of life—material, moral and cultural—to assist their members to become more useful citizens. If, in the U.S.S.R., a citizen is tried for any offence it is the duty of

the trade union not only to pay any expenses which may arise out of the case, but in addition to assist the court in the reform of the person concerned, if found guilty. In the case of serious offence the person may be deprived of liberty and sent to a labour camp. In such circumstances he or she will lose trade union membership. But a common treatment of less serious offences lies in the imposition of what is called, strangely enough, "forced labour." When condemned to forced labour a Soviet citizen retains his or her liberty, but a regular deduction is made from wages as a sort of instalment-system fine. In addition, and this is the most important part of the treatment, the trade union organization at the individual's particular place of work must pay special attention to this person's affairs and see that everything is done to eliminate such personal characteristics as lead to the committing of an anti-social act.

From 1917 to the present time much propaganda in this country has been carried on to the effect that in the "U.S.S.R. there are no longer moral standards. Nothing could be more misleading. But whereas, in Britain, our moral standards have been formed and crystallized in a legal system which is consistent with the existing type of property relations, in the U.S.S.R. the old conventions and laws were thrown overboard with the Revolution. Typical of this was the new status given to women and the resulting effect on marriage. Soviet marriage is a mutual contract. The dissolution of a Soviet marriage is almost, though nowadays not quite, as simple as marriage itself. But the responsibility of fathers for their children, whether born within or outside legal wedlock, is strictly enforced. The aim of Soviet law is to safeguard the interests of children; to protect women from exploitation by men for sexual purposes; to make all citizens equal, and to share equally the responsibility of parenthood, in so far as the State itself cannot yet shoulder all responsibility. It is also considered, as shown from experience, that in the interests of the children themselves some sort

of family life is desirable, and therefore a stable family life is strongly encouraged.

It should be mentioned here, however, that Soviet family life is based on the idea of complete sex equality.

Bit by bit the extra burdens on the women are being removed by means of social insurance, public services in the form of crèches, kindergartens and dining-rooms, and the opportunity for all women to receive equal pay with men for equal work. While the legal restrictions on personal liberty are small, public opinion may, in any case of 'uncomradely' behaviour, take stern measures against an offender. In the U.S.S.R. a person is not confined to formal resort to the law if suffering, say, from bad treatment at the hands of another. If a woman is maltreated by her husband, for example, a complaint to the trade union organizer at his place of work may, and often is, sufficient to mobilize public opinion in her defence. If a serious situation arises it may still not be sufficiently grave for legal proceedings. Many factory 'Comradely Courts' have been held to deal with individuals who are behaving in an uncomradely way in their private life, just as many are held on industrial matters concerned with factory organization.

In the early years of the Revolution there was, of course, a bitter conflict between the new standards and the old. To-day, with a new generation growing up, the new are conquering; but upholders of the old are still alive, and often vocal. I have described the way in which my landlady spoke on economic affairs. She was equally caustic about the schools and the manners of modern children. Bitter conflicts with her daughter resulted. But that daughter, later bringing up her own children under Soviet conditions, would not find those conflicts of principle constantly arising which divided her and her mother. In Britain to-day parents complain about the callousness of the rising generation. Domestic conflict in middle-class families between parents and children appears to be considerably greater to-day than it was in the days

of Queen Victoria. This, I think, is because middle-class youth to-day senses social maladjustments which their elders will often not admit. Conflict results. And in the U.S.S.R. after the Revolution such conflicts developed in the most acute form. When members of some families find themselves on different sides of the barricades in street fighting, many other families are likely to be divided against themselves intellectually and morally to an extreme degree. To-day, with a new race of parents as well as children, such conflicts are on the decline. The young Soviet parents of to-day have the same outlook as their children. The family of the Soviet Union to-day is becoming an institution as united in its outlook as the middle-class Victorian family in this country at the end of the last century. But whereas our own Victorian middle-class family was based on class inequality, on the domination of the middle-class over the wage-earners, of the father over the family, and of Britain over the rest of the world, the new Soviet family is united on principles which will last much longer, for they do not generate further conflict: the principle of equality of citizenship between all who work, equality of father, mother and children, all being citizens of a socialist republic, and equality of all nations and nationalities within the Union of Soviet Republics. In the family with which I lived and which I have described, this new unity had not yet expressed itself. Among other people whom I met I saw this sense of common interest between all members of the family already in existence.

As a man I know that, however I deal with this subject, I shall express the position inadequately. For it is the women and not the men who have become emancipated since the Revolution in the sphere of sex and family. I happen to know several English women who have worked for many years in the U.S.S.R. and who have now returned to England. They have told me how, after living in the Soviet Union, they now cannot forget in England that they are women. In the Soviet

Union they were citizens, here they are women. And in every aspect of their daily life they are treated here as women, whereas there they were treated as fellow-citizens. No man can fully appreciate what this means any more than an Englishman can appreciate in the U.S.S.R. what is felt by a Jew or an Indian or a Negro who goes to live there for the first time. The essentially new features of the Soviet family lie, not in the popularization of birth-control or laws legalizing or making illegal the operation of abortion, but in the basic fact of everyday life that women are citizens like men, and not treated primarily as women, as a separate category, earning lower wages excluded from a vast range of occupations, and refused admission to a large number of social institutions. The new family relations arising from such equality are still far from fully developed. Already, however, certain features of the new type of family are discernible.

I have sometimes heard apprehension expressed, not inside the U.S.S.R. but in this country, at the fact that families may still employ domestic assistance if they wish to do so. To some this appears to spell the perpetuation of 'class'. In the Soviet Union, on the other hand, I have never heard such a view expressed, for the ordinary reaction of people whom I met was simply this: "If anyone needs domestic help and is ready to pay for it at trade union rates, why should they not have it?" But the domestic workers' trade union is not quite so complacent about it. For in a country where labour is short, personal service is considered less socially useful than many other occupations. And the domestic workers' union, therefore, does its utmost to qualify its members for more socially useful work. The result is that most domestic workers consist of women who are too old to train for any other job, or peasant girls who seize on this occupation on first coming to town, because the employer is obliged to provide sleeping accommodation, and the present housing shortage makes this important. No sooner does such a

girl start work than she is approached by the domestic workers' union to become a member. And, no sooner does she join, than she is asked to attend evening classes to raise her qualifications for more skilled and better paid work. For this purpose every Soviet domestic worker is guaranteed two full evenings off in six days, in addition to the regular one day off in every six.

The effect that this has on the personalities of the domestic workers can well be imagined. They regard themselves as citizens, equal with everyone else, including their employers, and know that if they raise their qualifications successfully there is nothing to stop them, within a reasonable period, earning wages as good as those of the people who employ them. I personally know of one example, a girl who first came to Moscow as a domestic worker in 1932, whom I saw in 1937 when I was back in the U.S.S.R. on a tour. When she first came to town she had the barest of elementary educations, and was what an English employer would have called a "stupid girl." In this country she would have gone from one domestic job to another without the slightest hope of ever rising to something better. But when I saw her in 1937, at the flat where she had been previously employed, she told me: "I've given up this work now. I'm in a laboratory, and studying to become an engineer!"

#### NOTE TO 1943 EDITION

In Britain, even in face of the urgent needs of war, there were in March this year only "1,200 wartime nurseries in England and Wales with another 307 in preparation and a further 139 under consideration." (*Labour Monthly*, Vol. XXV, No. 7, p. 219).

In contrast, in peace-time in the U.S.S.R., in the year 1937, there were over 22,000 crèches for the children of working women, with a total of over 723,000 beds (Gosfinizdat, 1939).

## CHAPTER VI

### I TRAVEL

**W**ORKING and living in Moscow had given me a considerable insight into the daily life of a Soviet city. But Moscow was the capital, and I was interested in seeing how life was being lived in other parts of the country. On this subject one constantly received the most varied reports. There were those who said that Moscow, being the centre, was far better off in every respect than the rest of the U.S.S.R.; and I frequently heard quite the opposite, that, because of the overcrowding and the strain on the transport system Moscow was not nearly so well off as far as ordinary everyday goods were concerned as many provincial towns. I wished to decide such questions for myself, and to travel about the country.

Among my private pupils there was a couple of geologists, man and wife, who were contemplating an expedition to the Altai mountains during the summer. In previous summers, instead of using the vacation for a holiday, they had been combining work with leisure, and had on several occasions travelled to remote parts of the U.S.S.R., adding new mountains and glaciers to the map, and making important geological discoveries. For this summer a return visit to Altai was being planned, and I was invited to join the expedition. Unfortunately, however, the plans fell through, and the expedition was cancelled.

By the end of June I had saved almost three thousand roubles from my year's work and calculated that I could easily travel continuously for two or three months on this money. I did not want to travel as a foreign tourist but as a Soviet worker, staying in Soviet hotels and tourist

hostels rather than in the hotels of Intourist, which were more expensive, and in which I should only meet people from abroad. At this time within the U.S.S.R. all travelling arrangements for tourists who were Soviet citizens were in the hands of the Society of Proletarian Tourism and Excursions. It was a very easy matter to become a member of this society, so I joined. The society had a vast network of hostels for tourists, both in towns and country places. They were rather similar to our own youth hostels. Members could obtain food and a night's lodging at them.

All round Moscow, in the most beautiful country districts, the society had already by 1932 built up a network of 'tourist bases' to which workers from the town could make excursions on their free days. The usual excursion was for one or two nights, leaving after work on the evening before free day and returning the next evening, or, if the shift started later in the day, the morning after the day off. Such excursions were developed on a considerable scale, and I participated in one or two before my summer holiday began. It is rather surprising that while sanatoria and rest-homes have received world-wide publicity this society, catering for some two million holiday-makers a year, has hardly ever been mentioned in the Press or books written outside the U.S.S.R. While the fascist countries have received a great deal of publicity for a comparatively small amount of working-class tourism, it is a scandal that this enormous work in the U.S.S.R. has received so little notice.

In a small street in the centre of Moscow (Staleshnikov Periulok), I called at the main office of the Society of Proletarian Tourism in the summer of 1932. The society was usually referred to by its initials, O.P.T.E., and I shall refer to it in this way in future. In addition to its central Moscow office it also had a number of smaller offices situated in the largest factories of the capital, and also branch offices in the main provincial towns and in the other capitals of the Soviet Republics. In these offices

you could book any kind of holiday—from a day's excursion to some country place a few miles from the city to a six-weeks' excursion in the Altai mountains or the Arctic. As I wished to travel for some time and not to be tied down to one particular excursion, I made a special arrangement with the society by which, as temporary correspondent of the *New Leader*, I was given a letter of introduction to all tourist bases; while at the same time, for the purpose of walking through the Caucasus, I linked up for that period with one of the society's organized groups.

I planned my route roughly as follows: From Moscow I was to go by boat, down the Moscow river to Gorky, then, having stayed a day or two and having changed steamers, down the Volga to Stalingrad. From there I intended to travel by train to the great State farms of Gigant and Verblud, and thence to Rostov. From there I would take the train to Naltchik in the North Caucasus, join an organized group of tourists, and thence, partly on foot, through the Caucasus to the Black Sea coast. From there I vaguely intended to visit Tiflis, capital of Georgia; Erivan, capital of Armenia; and then to return across the Georgian military road to the North Caucasus, visit the oil-fields of Grozny, and then find my way back north, through Rostov, Kharkov, Dniπροstroï, to Moscow. At every one of the places here mentioned there was a tourist base where I could stay; while I would travel in the trains in the Russian manner, not enjoying the privilege of getting my bookings made through Intourist.

For the purpose of travelling I took with me as little luggage as possible. A rucksack, with an aluminium teapot slung on at the back, was all my baggage. The rucksack will appear to the reader to be quite useful; the teapot, perhaps, not so necessary. But the traveller in Russian trains who has not got his teapot is lacking one of the necessities of life, for in every Russian railway-station there is a boiler constantly supplying hot water to the

tea-making traveller, and there are few travellers who do not carry their teapot with them, refreshing themselves at one station after another with glasses of tea. At the same time peasants sell their produce at every station, whether it be garden produce (such as fruit), dairy produce (milk and cheese and curds) or freshly roasted chicken or cooked fish caught from the local rivers; or bread or buns, baked from their own flour by the peasants in their homes. At this time I found that on the banks of the Volga it was possible to obtain a considerably greater variety of bread than in Moscow, and whereas in Moscow even the whitest bread suggested our English wholemeal, in the Volga towns on this trip I was frequently able to obtain real white bread.

The first days of this journey were mainly a rest from the town. From Moscow to Gorky took us about four days in a small paddle-steamer, on a winding course, most of the time between grassy banks with flat fields stretching away to the dim distance. Sometimes, at a sharp bend in the river, we would almost run aground, and on one occasion we struck a sandbank and it took several hours, pushing with poles and tugging with a little motor launch until we at last got off. On this part of the journey there were very few passengers; a woman doctor and her two daughters on holiday, and, as far as I remember, only one or two other persons were on board.

After Moscow the town of Gorky (at one time Nizhni-Novgorod) appeared like an overgrown village. Now this term is used with a keen sense of what it signifies, for Muscovites even to-day use this term in speaking about Moscow. On a high promontory, overlooking the wide sweep of the great Volga river and the river Oka which joins it here, stands the old Kremlin of Nizhni-Novgorod. Along one side is a promenade, crowded every evening by the inhabitants of Gorky, both old and young. From this promontory there is a view which extends for tens of miles in every direction, and, across the river, the new automobile plant—

at that time just beginning to operate—together with a number of other factories of a new industrial town. Beyond the factories could be seen new blocks of flats, just completed, or still in process of erection.

On arrival I at once went to the tourist base and booked my bed. For a fixed charge tourists were provided with a bed in a dormitory and three meals, the meals being obtained in a neighbouring restaurant. While on the one hand, the town had its tramway, on the other, one was struck by the fact that practically all the roads, with few exceptions, were still cobbled, and, in that very hot weather, exceedingly dusty. In the older part of the town there was still little or no sign of new construction; all the new buildings seemed to be concentrated across the water, round the automobile plant and other factories, where a new town was coming into existence.

I did not have more than an evening and the following morning in Gorky, as I had to catch the steamer to Stalingrad or wait for another three days. The steamers on the Volga, as on the Moscow river and the Oka, were paddle-driven; but those of the Volga were considerably larger in size than on the smaller rivers. On the upper-deck there were first-and-second-class cabins, while below there was the third-class accommodation, which served in effect as the local 'tramway' between the towns and villages on the Volga. The third-class accommodation was for this reason almost as crowded as the Moscow trams, with peasants travelling from town to village, or from village to town, with their sacks and chickens, and often with a whole family in attendance. Usually among the travellers there were several musical instruments, and evenings were spent in singing and dancing.

In comparing here the type of steamer on the Volga and on the Moscow and other smaller rivers I use the past tense. I do this because in the interval between 1932, when I made that journey and the time of writing, considerable changes have taken place. To-day the Moscow river is deeper than it was in 1932. The Moscow-Volga

Canal now brings water into the channel of the Moscow river that previously never came within fifty miles of Moscow. As a result new river-craft is replacing the old. The new ships on the Moscow river, suited for the whole length of the canal and for the deepened river from Moscow to Gorky, are vastly superior to that little ship on which I travelled in 1932. The craft on the Volga river is also undergoing change, so that all that is here written dates considerably. But so does everything written about the U.S.S.R.!

Certain readers may be surprised at my reference to first, second, and third class on the steamers. When I add that in the train services of the U.S.S.R. the same terms are also sometimes used some of you may exclaim: "Oh, but I thought classes had been abolished in the U.S.S.R." Let me, therefore, at this point explain that when it is said that classes have been abolished in the U.S.S.R., this means that the division of society into landlords, employers, and working people has been abolished. To-day every Soviet citizen works for a living or is the dependant of someone who works for a living, or lives on a pension acquired through past years of work, or through being a housewife of a worker now deceased. Apart from this social use of the term 'class' we in Britain talk of first-and third-class railway travel, classes in schools, and so on; in these contexts the word having nothing whatever to do with classes in the sociological or political sense of the term.

It may be remarked here that in the U.S.S.R. the provision of different classes of steamer travel is on a par with the selling of goods of different qualities in the shops. Contrary to much that has been said and written about Socialism, the U.S.S.R. does not aim at standardizing tastes or incomes; it is aiming at the greatest possible variety of human consumption and at satisfying the most varied tastes. But it can only achieve this by developing production to a vastly greater extent than at present, and to do this it is necessary to give the maximum incentive by pay-

ing people more for more important work. At present the most important thing is to stimulate everyone to increase their skill, since there is a great shortage of skilled workers of all kinds. Some day it may be necessary to give people a special stimulus to do the uninteresting, unskilled work, when everyone prefers and has the capacity for something more qualified. But in the meantime the slogan is "to each according to his work." According to their earnings and tastes people may have a 2-rouble seat at a theatre or a 10-rouble seat; a 100-rouble coat or a 500-rouble coat; a 'hard' seat in a train where they can sleep without a mattress; or, in the first-class, a soft, well-sprung bed. Such distinctions of quality will exist for a very long time, and possibly always, even in Communist society, for there is no reason whatever to suppose that everyone will always want the same quality of everything, for, as we know, people differ in their opinions very much as to what kind of thing is most comfortable, and many prefer simplicity to luxury even though they can afford the latter.

A number of visitors to the U.S.S.R. with whom I am acquainted who have travelled on the Volga boats have been very shocked at the third-class accommodation. This same disgust was strongly expressed by Ethel Mannin, though in her case it was not a river-boat but a boat on the Caspian Sea that roused her. To those who are unaccustomed to Russian travel on the one hand, and to third-class or steerage travel on board ship on the other, the third-class on the Volga steamers appears appallingly overcrowded. Actually, having experienced Moscow trams and the Moscow suburban railways before I sailed on the Volga, the third-class accommodation did not strike me as being too bad, for it actually corresponds, in the nature of its traffic, to the trams and suburban railways of Moscow itself. In the third-class of a Volga steamer you have the same traffic between town and village as you have on Moscow's suburban railway lines—similar people, and often a similar overcrowding.

When on this subject of overcrowded travel it is

necessary to explain why such overcrowding exists. No foreigner visits Moscow who is not impressed by the crowded trams, and no traveller in the U.S.S.R., unless he obtains his tickets through Intourist or another organization that receives preference, can be sure of not having to wait for *several days* in a queue in order to obtain a ticket. I remember how, after my trip through the Caucasus which I describe later, fellow-tourists had to book their places in the train back to Moscow some three or four days in advance. The trains were carrying their maximum load all the time. Now this difficulty in obtaining tickets means a considerable increase in discomfort for the traveller. But—and this is the important point—it is better to travel to the south for a holiday even after waiting in a queue than not to travel at all. And, throughout the U.S.S.R., both locally and for long distances, there has been a phenomenal growth of travelling since the Revolution. Take, for example, that sphere of travel in which there is great overcrowding and which gave rise to this discussion: river transport. In 1913 there were just over eleven million river-transport passengers, in 1932 this figure had risen to over forty-eight million. And with regard to railway transport we see similar changes, the number of people carried during a year rising from twenty-five billion passenger-kilometres in 1913 to eighty-four in 1932. These figures have, of course, considerably increased since 1932.

But while I do not want for one moment to appear to be excusing the overcrowding in Soviet suburban passenger transport in Moscow itself and on the Volga, I feel that the comparative backwardness of the U.S.S.R. in this respect must not be exaggerated. When we realize that Britain has had a hundred years of railway transport, yet people travel daily to and from London packed like sweating sardines in suburban railway carriages; that, throughout Great Britain queues have to form for suburban bus services, particularly in the working-class districts; and that the modern and advanced city of New

York holds a world record in the crowding of underground passengers into a limited space—I feel that we have not much right to cast stones at Moscow for similar failings, even if rather more intense at the present time. And when it comes to long-distance railway travel the problem is the same.

It is not uncommon in the U.S.S.R. to find peasants camping outside railway stations for days waiting for a train. Now this does not happen in Britain, but in British India it does, and I remember describing such scenes to a group of Indian students in London, when they were most amused at the close similarity between the U.S.S.R. and India in this respect. Tsarist Russia, of course, was like India in many other respects.

The voyage down the Volga from Gorky to Stalingrad is not one which I would recommend to the tourist visiting the U.S.S.R. for three weeks or a month. The reason is that, though always in sight of land, the time available for going ashore is very short—there may be enough time for a rapid walk round a town or village when the boat stops, or for a short swim, but not more. The time is better spent on land if you are only on a short visit.

Stalingrad presented, in the summer of 1932, like Gorky, a series of sharp contrasts. On the one hand there were the usual Russian streets, cobble-stoned and dusty, and the one or two-storied wooden houses so typical of old Russia and even of the U.S.S.R. hitherto. On the other hand there were three-storey brick and stone buildings to which two more storeys were being added; a street here would be up, concrete was replacing the asphalt; and while on one occasion I saw a camel used for transport, new tramlines were being laid and the city boundaries extended. As in Gorky, the greatest construction was taking place not in the old centre of the town but on the outskirts, in the new industrial centre that was a product of the Five-Year Plan. I paid a visit to the tractor plant and to the buildings surrounding it;

fine blocks of modern flats, laid out with ample space for gardens and greenery between the buildings.

It was in Stalingrad that interesting light was thrown on the housing question for me from the Russian 'worker-peasant' point of view. As in every new Soviet town the building of new flats had not kept pace with the rapid growth of the working population, and as a result there were whole settlements in the surrounding country which the workers had built themselves. Sir Walter Citrine, on a visit to Dnieproghes, describes his own personal investigations of "What Visitors are Not Shown:"

We had not far to walk. Right by the modern apartment-houses there was one hovel standing by itself. It was just dreadful to look at. Not more than a shed with pieces of tattered washing clinging to the line outside, and with a woman trying to cook something over a fire on the open ground.<sup>1</sup>

It was a settlement of 'sheds' such as these that attracted my attention in Stalingrad, and I spent a morning wandering about them. The houses, made of wood and plastered with clay, looked on the outside anything but pleasant. I did, however, enter one or two, and though the space was tiny, these little houses were spotlessly clean. Many of the women during the fine weather did their cooking outside in ovens made of clay; in the winter, however, they did everything indoors.

I shall not easily forget a conversation I had with one of the housewives living in one of these, to use Sir Walter Citrine's term, 'hovels.' She was an enthusiastic housewife, very proud of her clean but minute one-roomed cottage, which she and her husband had themselves built on arriving at Stalingrad. They had two children. Her husband worked at the tractor plant, and, pointing to the great new blocks of modern flats being erected near the factory, I said to her: "I suppose that before long you will be moving into one of those?" "No, never," was

<sup>1</sup> Sir Walter Citrine, *I Search for Truth in Russia* (Routledge), p. 205.

the reply. I wondered what the meaning of this could be; could it be that ordinary workers like these never expected to enjoy the good houses that were now being built? That is the conclusion, I am sure, that Sir Walter might have drawn, without carrying on the conversation any further. "Why won't you ever live there?" I asked. And this was the answer: "Why, we built this ourselves, and we are on our own here. There they all live in flats; we'll never go and live in one of those blocks." Peasant individualism was still strong; the family's home-made 'hovel' was a source of pride; great modern blocks of flats were scorned—too crowded together; wood-and-mud hut or 'hovel' were very much preferred.

But that woman's husband would earn better wages, and raise his qualifications at his job. The two children would go to school, and begin to demand that the family find a better place to live in. And, bit by bit that proud housewife herself would feel the need for something more solid, more rainproof and altogether better than the little hut that they had built themselves. I tell this story, not because I want in any way to justify the bad housing which undoubtedly exists in the U.S.S.R., but because I want to show that, in any country, we can only judge the housing of the people according to existing standards, and if those standards are improving as fast as material resources allow then there will not be any great dissatisfaction with existing conditions. But, on the other hand, in the U.S.S.R. it must always be remembered that it is only dissatisfaction that spurs on progress. If the workers in Stalingrad who lived in hovels preferred this, then at factory meetings when they discussed how to spend money in the cultural interests of the workers, they would put other things first and housing would come late on the list. The more the people felt discontented with their housing the more they would demand that more funds should go to housing construction. And in my own experience in the U.S.S.R. the demand for housing still comes fairly low down in the public mind on the list of increased amenities required.

I am pretty sure that at the present moment new schools, theatres, and hospitals are regarded as more worthy of the expenditure of resources than new houses.

From Stalingrad I travelled by slow train to the great State farm at Gigant. This farm was an experiment in large-scale farming—too large-scale, as it turned out—and by the time I visited it the farm had already been split into four different administrative areas, which later became four completely distinct farms. At that time the yield per acre was very low. I remember, in the train from Stalingrad to Gigant, sharing a compartment with four peasant women. Conversation is never lacking in a Russian train, and as the train ambled through the countryside the women began to talk of the prospects of the harvest. "There will be little bread," one said, "look at those fields—weeds, weeds, weeds." "Yes," said another, "the men won't do any work now they're in the Collective; they think they can leave it all to us." So it went on. And this was not the only conversation of that kind which I heard that late summer and early autumn. The harvest was going to be a bad one because the new Collective and State farms were working badly, partly due to laziness, partly to inexperience, and partly to deliberate sabotage and organized opposition on the part of the better-off peasantry.

At Gigant I stayed as usual at a tourist base organized by the Society of Proletarian Tourism. There were a number of other visitors to the great Gigant, mainly industrial workers from the towns, and on one day during our visit we set out to do a day's voluntary work (the Russian *subbotnik*) at harvesting. The first *subbotnik*, by the way, was organized in the early days of the Revolution when, after an exceptional fall of snow, the workers mobilized themselves in their spare time to clear the streets. On this occasion Lenin personally participated in the work of clearing the snow from the grounds of the Kremlin. From that day to this the *subbotnik*, or voluntary work on a free day, remains an important means of meeting

emergencies in the U.S.S.R. While, in certain parts of the farm I saw combines at work, in others the harvesting was being done by hand with scythes, and we worked that day on raking together the scythed corn, rather as one rakes hay in this country. Obviously there was a serious dislocation between the scale of the farm on the one hand and the quantity of modern machinery in good repair and with capable workers on the other. As a result this vast 'mechanized' agricultural unit was in fact only partly mechanized; much of the work was still being done most primitively by hand.

In the centre of Gigant there was a small square. On one side several blocks of modern flats, on the other the administrative offices; a large department store (only later on to be adequately stocked with goods), and a great club, cinema, and theatre, for the entertainment of the workers. In the evening I attended the cinema with the youth of Gigant, and saw an amusing Soviet comedy about a young worker with an invention: a bureaucrat determined to steal from him all credit and financial gain from the invention, a love interest that did not, as in a capitalist film, end 'happily ever after,' and a good deal of happy knockabout fun. In an English village one can also see films, but this great cinema and theatre, and the blocks of flats, rising up in the plains where there had been no human habitation before, and while, in the nearest village, there were only one-storey wooden houses, showed a rapidity of change such as the U.S.S.R. has alone known over the past ten years on such a gigantic scale.

From Gigant I went on to Verblud, another State farm, now run purely for experimental purposes, and thence to Rostov. It is interesting here to note the change in the status of these great State farms since the year 1932. At that time it was still thought that the giant State farm would become one of the Soviet Union's chief sources of grain. Collectivization was adopted rather as a transitory form of organization to acclimatize the peasants to large-scale farming methods prior to the universal intro-

duction of a State farming system. To-day it is the Collective farms which have proved their worth, and the State farms have either been divided up, their territory being handed over for the use of the nearest collectives, or else they are being run as model farms, mainly as research stations and for the education of the local collective farmers. No longer are they expected to be the main source of grain; the collectives have proved to be by far the most satisfactory form of large-scale farming enterprise in the U.S.S.R. What is the explanation of this change in emphasis? Why have collective farms been recognized as the best type of large-scale farm in present conditions in the U.S.S.R.?

The explanation lies, I think, entirely in the psychology of the peasant, and in the necessity for the Soviet State in its policy to satisfy the needs of the producers in order that production shall be increased. The peasants received the land by decree in 1917. The land, technically speaking, was 'nationalized,' while it was actually placed at the disposal of the peasants for their own use, the landed estates for the most part being divided up by the rural soviets according to the needs of the local peasantry. Collectivization means the pooling of these land-holdings; but the peasants retain their use of the land for themselves; there is no question of their becoming agricultural labourers working for wages. And, in practice, it is this form of holding that has had the widest appeal.

Now this is particularly interesting, for the following reasons. In the State farm, as in the State factory, the workers receive wages according to the work they do. Whatever the weather may be the workers receive fixed rates of wages for given amounts of work. They are, therefore, insured against any suffering from poor harvest. In this way the State farm provides a security of income for its workers which the old individual peasant household never enjoyed; and which the collective farmers do not enjoy—since their income is a share of the harvest—and a bad harvest, however much labour is spent on pro-

curing it, brings in a smaller income per head than a large one. It is in spite of this advantage of the State farm over the collective as far as security goes that the collective farms have proved to be the most popular and most efficient form of large-scale communal farming, and have now been made practically universal even to the extent of dividing up certain State farm lands among the collectives.

My visits to Rostov was on the whole uneventful. I rather regarded it as a stopping-place between the rural areas of the North Caucasus and my visit to the mountains and only spent a day in the city. Rostov was striking, however, in this respect, that after Moscow, Gorky, and the towns on the Volga, it gave the impression of a European city and did not have the semi-village aspect of the Russian towns farther east and north. Rostov also boasted a magnificent public garden, more beautiful than any public park I had seen elsewhere in the U.S.S.R.

The tourist base in Rostov was very crowded as this was a junction for travellers passing from the cities of the north to their summer holidays in the south. There were numerous visitors from Moscow and Leningrad on their way to the Crimea and the Caucasus, and in addition there were groups of worker tourists from other centres who were visiting certain of the towns of the Union. Most of these visitors had a day or two extra to wait in Rostov owing to the intense difficulty in obtaining long-distance railway tickets. Fortunately, by stressing my importance as a correspondent of a foreign paper, I was able to obtain a certain degree of preference for which I fought ruthlessly!

From Rostov I travelled by train to Kislovodsk, perhaps the most renowned of the mountain resorts in Caucasus mountains. To-day this town is a centre for rest-homes and sanatoria; before the Revolution it was also a health resort, but of a rather different kind.

Stephen Graham thus describes it in 1916:

"An unhealthy spot this Kislovodsk, the air of its little streets heavy with the odour of decay and dirt." It is in a valley and

there are glorious moors and hills about it. But one never sees any visitor on the hills. The visitors keep to the leafy promenades in the park, within hearing of the music of the bandstands and in reach of the café and the ice-cream bar. The women are mostly in white, but more coarse of feature than in most places in Russia—the faces of women on a low level of intelligence, of the sort who pride themselves on being ‘interesting’ to men. They wear their diamonds in the afternoon . . . ”<sup>1</sup>

In 1932 I did not see any women wearing diamonds. The faces of the women, dressed in white, who were spending a holiday at the numerous rest-homes and sanatoria were not faces of people “on a low level of intelligence.” On the contrary they were the faces of people who had responsibilities, who did work of social importance and realized this. And, most important of all, the hills round Kislovodsk were no longer deserted by the visitors, but their natural beauty was enjoyed to the full. On the hillsides above Kislovodsk I met people walking and climbing, leaving the little town in the valley for the air of the mountains. The unhealthy spot of 1916 had become more healthy. Visitors whose only haunt had been ice-cream bars and bandstands were learning to enjoy the wildness of sweeping hillsides. But they were not even the same people; for to-day it is working people who spend holidays in Kislovodsk. Even the mountains have become the property of the working people.

<sup>1</sup> Stephen Graham, *Russia in 1916* (Cassell), p. 119.

## CHAPTER VII

### “PROLETARIAN TOURIST”

**A**s far as Kislovodsk I had been travelling on my own as an individual. Henceforth, for some time, I was to be a member of an organized group. From Kislovodsk I wanted to walk to Naltchik, a three-day walk through the mountains, and the guides of O.P.T.E. advised me not to go alone. There happened to be three other people wanting to do this same walk, so an impromptu group of four was formed, including a printer from Moscow, a teacher from the town of Ordjonikidze in the Caucasus, and another whose profession I forget. From the base we were given supplies for twenty-four hours. We were told where we should find further bases on the way, and off we went.

For those who enjoy a holiday on foot in unspoilt country, but who like to feel that there is an organization in the vicinity which has hostels for the use of tourists, the Caucasus during the past ten years of Soviet development has become ideal. Every night as members of O.P.T.E. we were able to find somewhere to sleep. In one little village it was a school-house, and at another it was on the premises of a new State dairy just recently erected (the manager of the dairy was delighted to show us round, we ‘tasted’ the milk generously). At each stop we were able to obtain butter and eggs and other things necessary to the refreshment of the inner man. During our walk in the heat of the day we would sometimes come across a herdsman on horseback with sour goats’-milk in a sheepskin bottle at his side, and with this we would refresh ourselves.

The town of Naltchik, capital of Karbardino-Balkaria,

is one of the main starting-points for tourists in the Caucasus. It is from here that the expeditions to Mount Elbrus make their start with a day's journey by automobile, along the most hair-raising roads to the village of Tiberda before the climb on foot begins. At Tiberda, an exquisite mountain village which to-day caters as much for tourists as any place of similar size in Switzerland, there was a magnificent O.P.T.E. hostel, at which we had our meals on an enormous verandah, with a superb view of the mountains. A doctor here examined every member who wished to climb Mount Elbrus. Research was already being started into the effect of mountain air on the human frame, and the latest news is that on Elbrus itself there will be a great research station which will investigate conditions at high altitudes, not the least important branch of such research being the effect of high altitudes on climbers, thus accumulating data which has hitherto never been collected on a large scale at any mountain-climbing centre.

It was at Naltchik that I became a member of an organized group of ten ; who, from Moscow, had booked for a tour to the Caucasus and who had decided on the route from Naltchik *via* Elbrus through the little country of Svanetia down to the Black Sea at Batum. This group included the most varied occupations. We had with us two doctors, two girls from a chemical factory, two young workers from other factories, a woman architect and a man working in some trading organization, a young biologist of working-class family, and one other man whose occupation I forget. On meeting, one of the first things we did was to elect a leader whose job it was at each tourist base to make the necessary arrangements for the accommodation and feeding of the group, which saved us any personal bother with tickets or meal-vouchers from the beginning of the expedition to the end.

• It is interesting that, even as late as 1932, the existence of bandits in the Caucasus was still a fact of some importance to tourists. My first realization of this came at Kislovodsk

when one of the guides at the tourist office asked us if we had a revolver in case we met bandits. None of us had, and no more was said about it. But apparently even as late as 1932 cases of banditry were still known in this area, and the Soviet authorities had not yet entirely succeeded in stimulating in everyone the desire for a peaceful occupation, though, as elsewhere there were already more than enough peaceful occupations to go round.

Its organization of a network of tourist bases, so that it was possible to walk from Tiberda on the north of the Caucasus range to Kutais on the south, having a place to sleep in comparative comfort on every night of the journey, says something for the enterprise of O.P.T.E., for this was no Switzerland with its mountain railways and funiculars. It was completely undeveloped country from the tourist point of view, and yet every night on this mountain hike we slept in a tourist base, received a hot evening and a hot morning meal, and had enough provisions to carry us through the day. Some days maize bread and the very salty white cheese that is so common in the Caucasus together with a hard-boiled egg, was all we had to choose from. On one rather amusing occasion, when we stayed in one place for twenty-four hours, we were fed continuously on beans. According to the conditions promised by O.P.T.E. we were guaranteed one three-course meal, 'dinner,' every day. At the best this would consist of soup, meat, and fruit or *compôte*. However, in one outlying base our dinner consisted of a first course of beans—very good brown beans, and I personally asked for nothing better. When we expressed our readiness for the second course we were immediately served with another helping of beans on a clean plate! Finally, before retiring to bed, we had a delicious supper of the same beans again. Before we left, the manager of the base asked us to write an 'appreciation' in the visitors' book. Unfortunately I cannot remember the tribute we paid to him and his beans, but it was certainly an apt one. And the specialist

on culture can draw his own conclusions from the fact that at a tourist base in the Caucasus clean plates were served with a second helping of beans!

On this Caucasian holiday I had the pleasant feeling for a short time during my tour that we were all foreigners together. To travel alone in another country without knowing the language really well becomes somewhat of a mental strain, and during my three months of travel my nerves felt a certain strain from the fact that I hardly ever had an opportunity of speaking the English language at all. But during this trip through the Caucasus the Russians were also faced with difficulties in making themselves understood. On one memorable occasion, somewhere on the slopes of Elbrus, we wanted to buy some eggs. We found it quite impossible to explain what we wanted to one of the local peasants until I—most accustomed of all to having to resort to strange devices to make myself understood—started flapping my arms and cackling in the classical manner of a hen that has laid an egg. Fortunately we were just in time to keep the peasant from slaughtering a young cockerel for our benefit. After that I gave up trying to be an interpreter from Russian into Georgian and the other languages with which we had to deal.

In the Caucasus there are a number of different nationalities living to-day in peaceful relations with each other. For the greater part of our tour we were in the Georgian Soviet Republic, but in the national territories through which we passed the local language was not Georgian, and Georgian was only the second language taught in the schools. It was in this connexion that I had a revealing conversation with a peasant in one of the villages at which we stopped. He was an old revolutionary, had fought in the war against foreign intervention, and was now a member of his village soviet. But he had one serious criticism: it was that the children were not learning Russian in the school in his village. First, they learnt their own language then they learnt Georgian (the language of

the Union Republic of which they were a part), but there was no Russian teacher! Now, before the Revolution, the main grievance of all the peoples of the Caucasus had been that the central government of the Russian empire had tried to russify them and to force the Russian language on them to the detriment of their own native tongue. The Soviet Government reversed this policy, giving to every nation and even to every national group the right to speak and write and educate its children in its own tongue. Now, as a direct result of this freedom for each nation to learn in its own language, I found a peasant in a small nationality in the Caucasus actually demanding that his son should learn Russian. As he put it: "If he doesn't learn Russian then he can only move about in our own Republic. But he may want to travel all over the Union, for which Russian is essential. That is why we are asking them to send us a Russian teacher for our school."

While in North Wales I frequently came across students who seriously suffered from the fact that they were forced to study and to pass their examinations in English—a foreign language to many of them. The resentment which this arouses has much to do with the existence of a Welsh nationalist movement. After working in the U.S.S.R. I sympathize with the Welsh people as I never did while working in Wales. I now see that they have a right to demand that their children shall be educated in their own tongue instead of having English thrust upon them. After my experience in the U.S.S.R. I am now also pretty sure that, once this right was in principle, conceded, there would be a development of Welsh culture far greater than has previously taken place, while at the same time there would be a genuine demand that English also be taught, so that Welsh people could travel with the facility of the English wherever the English language was spoken. But when the demand came from the Welsh to learn English as a second language in their own interests, the whole situation would be different from that which exists to-day, in which thousands of Welsh people seriously suffer because they

are forced, in order to obtain a university degree, to pass examinations in a language other than their own mother-tongue. The U.S.S.R. has solved this problem, and to-day the people in every national area are demanding to be taught Russian because of the international character of this language throughout Soviet territory.

While in Svanetia we spent several evenings in discussion, dancing, and music. At one of the tourist bases there was staying a woman scientist from Tiflis. She was combining her vacation with work as a guide for O.P.T.E., thus obtaining board and lodging free of charge. We spent one whole evening with her, discussing the old customs of the district, including the appalling conditions imposed on the women. During the last days of pregnancy and for several weeks after childbirth women in this district had, according to ancient custom, to retire from society, to bury themselves in cold cellars as things 'unclean.' According to custom in certain districts a woman had to spend forty days in such a dungeon after giving birth to a child. Only with the coming of the Revolution was an end put to such conditions through the opening of modern maternity clinics. But it had been a hard struggle; among the old people even to-day the ancient prejudices remained. Bit by bit the knowledge of modern medicine and modern education were penetrating the darkness of centuries; scientific workers from the towns came to these places with health propaganda. Schools were being opened. Women were rapidly learning to use their new-found equality with men.

Another evening was spent in dancing and singing, in the local village club. Among those present there were one or two Georgians with magnificent voices, who sang national songs late into the night. There was also dancing: Georgian dances, waltzes, and an attempt on the part of a few of ourselves to demonstrate 'Western' dancing to the Georgians.

I have mentioned the woman scientist who acted as a guide while we were in Svanetia. Her first name,

incidentally, was Tamara; her other name I do not remember. About two weeks later I was in Tiflis, capital of Georgia. Immediately on arrival I called at the general post-office to pick up my mail. I had a rucksack on my back, and as I came out of the post-office an elderly woman stopped me and asked: "Have you been to Svanetia?" I replied that I had. "Did you meet a young woman called Tamara, working as a guide at one of the O.P.T.E. hostels?" "I did." "Oh, how is she? She has not written to me for weeks, and I am getting worried. She is my daughter." Apparently the mother had simply taken a chance that someone with a rucksack in Tiflis had probably been through Svanetia and seen her daughter. She was right. Incidentally, this story brings home the fact that in the U.S.S.R. people are notoriously bad correspondents—a fact I am constantly having to tell people in this country when they do not hear from friends and even organizations in the Soviet Union. Whereas in Britain it is customary to acknowledge letters, in the U.S.S.R. I have seldom heard of a letter being acknowledged unless there was some positive reply to be made to it.

From Svanetia we descended bit by bit to the Black Sea coast. Most of the time we were walking, but on the last day of our journey we were provided with a buggy to take us to Kutias, whence we travelled by train to the sea. This descent to the sea was through country of an entirely different character from that of the northern slopes of the Caucasus. We had crossed a frontier between north and south; pine-trees and grassy slopes had given way to vineyards and dry hill-sides; everywhere there was fruit, peasants selling it at the end of their gardens, or on the roads; and trees heavy with fruit hung over the roadside. The crossing from the northern slopes of the Caucasus to the south was like a journey from Switzerland to the south of France or Spain; only the change-over was not more than a matter of two days' walking.

During this tour I was much impressed by the stamina of the women members of the group. There were four of

them; they were all considerably worse shod for mountain walking than the men; yet on no occasion did they show the slightest signs of lagging, or in any way appear unequal to the men in walking or climbing. Particularly interesting to me, as a foreigner, was the fact that the two girls, aged about twenty-three, who were workers in a chemical factory, had a paid holiday of six weeks, and a six-hour day when at work. This was because they were on an occupation considered bad for the health. Both of them were studying in evening classes, and anticipated becoming qualified technicians within a few years. Both, also, had received grants from their factory in order to assist them to spend their holiday travelling.

With Batum I was somewhat disappointed. This old seaport had by 1932 changed very little indeed from pre-revolutionary days, whereas its companion town on the Caspian Sea, Baku, had been tremendously developed. This was due mainly to the comparative importance of Baku as an oil centre, whereas at Batum there was just one refinery. But the country round Batum was superb, and after one night in the town we finished our tour at Zelyonni Muis (Green Bay), which was just a half-hour's railway journey along the coast. On this beautiful bay a whole settlement had been organized as a tourist centre. Several villas, at one time belonging to the well-to-do of Russia, had been turned into sleeping places for the tourists. In addition, a large camping ground had been laid out, and many of the tourists slept in tents. From the base itself, with its wide dining-room verandah, it was just three minutes' walk to the sea, of which we had, a magnificent view through semi-tropical trees.

Green Bay is famous for two things. It has one of the world's finest botanical gardens, and it is also just near here that there are vast tea-plantations, steadily increasing from year to year, where the U.S.S.R. to-day obtains a great part of its own home-grown tea. In the botanical gardens much is being done to adapt foreign plants to Soviet conditions, and experiments are being made in adapting

different flora for commercial use.

The botanical gardens more or less merge into the tea-plantations which stretch over a range of little hills as far as the eye can see. Excursions from the tourist base to the tea gardens were often organized, and to my delight, at the tea-factory in the centre of the plantation, where the leaves are sorted, dried, and packed, I discovered a tea-taster who spoke English and who had served his apprenticeship in London. His admiration for the tea-tasters of London was quite touching, and under his charge a group of young Soviet citizens were learning his craft and always being told that the London standard was that at which they must aim!

It was at Green Bay that our little group of ten, who together had crossed the Caucasus, broke up. The tour gave us three days at Green Bay before returning to Moscow, possibly in order to ensure that people should receive railway tickets in good time. Even as it was, certain members of the group returned home late, as they had to wait more than three days before obtaining their return railway tickets back to Moscow. So full were the trains with holiday-makers at this time of year that it was indeed a problem to find a place in a long-distance train.

It is hard to realize, I think, for us who live in England, the extent to which holiday travel has become an accepted thing among the ordinary working people of the U.S.S.R. While still in Moscow I was not a little surprised when I found that my landlady and her daughter were planning a visit to the Crimea for a month during the summer. My landlady actually received two weeks' paid holiday, and was taking another two weeks at her own cost, a thing often done in the U.S.S.R. Although she was by no means a person with high earnings, she calmly decided that she and her daughter should make the three days' journey to the Crimea, and three days back; a far longer journey than an Englishman makes when he pays a visit to the south of France.

It is also interesting to note that while I knew them, the grandmother also had a holiday. Through my landlady's brother it was arranged that she should go for a fortnight to a rest-home connected with the electrical workers' union—not, of course, free of charge, as she herself was not a member of the union. I mention these details because, in our own British conditions, it is hard to imagine similar people in similar circumstances going any great distance for a holiday, though possibly they might have a week at the seaside very occasionally. Certainly in the U.S.S.R. people of corresponding economic position have vastly greater holiday opportunities than their fellow-workers in this country, and they make full use of them.

When our group of ten broke up and the majority returned to Moscow I continued my travels on my own. First I went by boat to Sochi and Gagra on the Black Sea coast, famous Soviet health-resorts; then to Novii Afon in my view the most beautiful spot on the Caucasian coast of the Black Sea; then, again by boat back to Batum, and by train to Tiflis and Erivan.

## CHAPTER VIII

### PEASANT COTTAGE AND SOVIET REST-HOME

**O**UR group dispersed and again I was on my own. I had heard much of the beauties of the Black Sea coast and particularly of Novii Afon, which I had been told I must visit. An American friend in Moscow had given me the name of a peasant living here, in a primitive wooden cottage on the very edge of the sea, while not far off was the great Novii Afon monastery, now converted into a rest-home for workers from all parts of the U.S.S.R. I stayed with the peasant family for about a week.

It was one of those half-peasant, half-worker families that are still so very common in the U.S.S.R. Man and wife had their little tobacco plantation which fully occupied them in the summer, while in the winter the husband worked in a local 'whale factory' where blubber was extracted from whales caught in the Black Sea. Besides their tobacco they had a cow. The family included three small children in addition to the father and mother.

The cottage was entirely home-made, built of wood, plastered with clay, thatched and whitewashed. There was one indoor room, whitewashed and spotlessly clean, with a smooth earth floor; and a large thatched outhouse, fitted with table and chairs, and with open sides like a verandah. In this out-house the tobacco was hung up to dry.

The first important lesson which I learnt when staying in this cottage was with regard to the question of building technique and housing conditions in the Soviet Union. For I saw at first hand the basic standard which the mass of the people had hitherto accepted as normal; and this

threw new light on conditions in the towns. I have mentioned earlier how the finish on so many of the new buildings was, in 1932, extremely rough. It was only by living in this cottage on the Black Sea coast that I realized why a ceiling falling down in a Moscow hostel was not taken by the students, coming mainly from worker and peasant families, as anything but a natural calamity.

This cottage was barely complete when I arrived, for some of the whitewashing was finished while I was living there. One dark night there came a fierce thunderstorm. Above the noise of the thunder, which was sufficient to keep me awake, there suddenly arose a loud wailing within the cottage itself, and, somewhat alarmed, I went to investigate. Mother and father were contemplating their new ceiling, most of which lay in a pile of dust on the floor, and mother was at the same time trying to comfort three frightened infants. The storm blew over. We slept till morning. And by the time I got up mother and father were already re-plastering their ceiling as if nothing unusual had occurred.

In making comments on the new buildings of the period of the first Five-Year Plan I always bore this incident in mind, for the builders of the new houses in Moscow were none other than the same peasants who for generations had built their own cottages and plastered them with mud. While modern methods of building were being introduced, the old level of technique still lingered, and as a result it was not a rare thing to find a building of modern Western design with the plaster work inside not much better executed than that of the ordinary peasant cottage in the village.

Another illustration of such a contrast which I shall always remember was a building job in Moscow in 1937. A conveyor was taking bricks continuously from the ground level to the fifth floor where the bricklayers were working. This, from the technical point of view, was a considerable advance on the building methods used in Britain even to-day. But, at the same time, two people

were carrying eight bricks on a tray with handles at each end—a job that would have been done by one British workman with a hod—or a wheelbarrow!

My peasant host quite often grumbled, and grumbled with considerable bitterness. And his main grouse was that the whale-factory for which he had worked during the winter still owed him a considerable sum in wages which he had not received. Such stories, it is to be noted, would delight any hostile critic of the U.S.S.R. as examples of the exploitation of the workers in the Soviet Union. Such a story, I may say, shocked me considerably. So I inquired exactly how it came about that this State factory had not paid its workers. My host then went into a long story of inefficiency, in which the manager of the factory had squandered the funds in various uneconomic ways, and the Commissariat of Finance had refused it any further advances. Then he made this comment, characteristic of the U.S.S.R.: "It's our own fault; we did not put a stop to what was going on. We had meetings, but we did not do anything about it. It's our own fault—we're to blame." I was not quite sure if my ears recorded correctly; a working man, with arrears of wages due, saying that he and his fellow-workers were to blame for this awful state of affairs. But pressed by me to put the blame on the State, he firmly replied: "No, it's not the State that's to blame, they've lost a lot of money over us already; it's our fault. We have the power, and if we don't see that things go all right, then we're to blame."

Such a point of view, from a man who was half-worker and half-peasant, not a member of the Communist party, and politically not at all advanced, brings home more clearly than any amount of description of the formal structure of Soviet industry the new sense of ownership and responsibility that exists among the working people of the U.S.S.R. They may grumble and they may grouse, they may condemn this or that official or group of officials; but however strong their condemnation is, we are making the greatest possible mistake if we assume that such condemnation in

the slightest degree represents an attack on the Soviet system or the Soviet government. In the U.S.S.R. I have always heard people grumble as openly as in Britain ; but with this difference, that in the U.S.S.R. they knew that grumbling was a means of changing conditions—criticizing a bad administrator at a meeting was the first step to getting him replaced ; whereas in Britain people tend to grumble as a safety-valve for their emotions when they feel that existing evils cannot be remedied. This was my second important lesson at Novii Afon.

It was while staying at this peasant cottage that I paid a visit to the rest-home and asked to see the manager. The manager, or rather manageress, on hearing that I was writing about my travels for a foreign paper, at once invited me to come and try the régime for a few days. As I wrote a description of it at the time, what follows is not based on memory but on my notes.

The Novii Afon rest-home had only been open for a year. The building had had a somewhat chequered career. Until 1924 it was a monastery inhabited by three or four hundred monks. It was then taken over by the State for cultural purposes, and for some time was used as a holiday hotel and later as a hostel for the tourist society, O.P.T.E. In 1931 it was opened as a rest-home, with accommodation for some 750 visitors at a time ; and a new hotel was built by the seashore.

The monastery buildings are on a steep hillside, approached from the sea through avenues of cypress. On the hills all round are olive and fruit trees. The building itself is in the form of a square, with a terrace in front with a magnificent view ; and inside there is a courtyard, with a church in the middle. This church is to-day a club for the visitors, with a library, cinema, stage, and a grand piano. The walls are richly decorated with paintings, and several ex-monks act as guides, explaining these paintings to visitors. The dining-hall, rather resembling the dining-hall of some English college, was also decorated with paintings of the saints ; and the place of four hund-

red monks was now taken, four times a day, by 750 visitors to the rest-home.

The day's time-table was roughly this. At nine in the morning the breakfast bell was rung and the doors of the dining-room opened. Before this, however, a number of the visitors had been for a bath, or played a game of tennis or volley-ball in the grounds of the monastery. During the morning bathing was the favourite pastime. Then, at three o'clock there was dinner (consisting of three courses), after which, according to the rule in every Soviet rest-home and sanatorium, there was the 'dead hour'—corresponding to the Spanish siesta—when it was strictly forbidden to make any noise in the vicinity of the building. If you wanted you could go for a walk, an excursion, read or write, or otherwise amuse yourself; but you were not permitted to behave in any way that would disturb those other, perhaps more sensible, people who went to bed. At five o'clock there was tea, and then, in the cool of the evening excursions were frequently organized to some place in the locality: up one of the small mountains in the neighbourhood, to a State farm, or to other places of general interest. Then, after an evening dip, if you felt like it, you came back to the rest-home for supper at eight; followed by a cinema show, dancing, or a concert in the evening.

In accordance with Soviet health policy, which stresses the fact that it is better to keep people in good health than to let them get ill and then cure them, every visitor to the rest-home started off with a medical examination. On the basis of this they were advised as to what they should and should not do in the course of their holiday, though, it should be said, no compulsion whatever was exercised in the case of those who saw fit to ignore the doctors' advice.

Accommodation at this rest-home was granted to individuals through their trade unions. Many unions had places permanently booked, and then allotted these places to their members according to their respective needs.

The rest-home itself charged a fixed rate of 200 roubles a month for all visitors. In some cases the visitors paid the full amount; in others everything, including the fare there and back, was paid by their trade union out of its social insurance funds. In other intermediate cases, according to the conditions of each individual applicant, the unions paid part of the cost while the applicant bore the rest personally. I may add here that subsequent experience in the U.S.S.R. showed me how this system worked from the point of view of the individual worker. In every trade union committee, in every Soviet organization, there is an elected 'social insurance delegate' whose job it is to supervise the giving of assistance to all who are ill or in need of sanatorium treatment or a good rest. On the basis of the recommendations of such a delegate, and the position of the individual worker, passes to rest-homes are distributed. The principle on which distribution is based includes both the need of the particular individual, his or her earnings, and the number of dependants. Thus, a low-paid worker with no dependants may receive a free pass, while workers with higher wages may have something to pay. A worker with several dependants, however, may not only receive a free pass personally to a rest-home but in addition receive assistance in order to send children to a summer camp. Each case is considered by the trade union committee on its merits, taking into consideration the position of the applicant.

It would be a mistake to suggest that even to-day there is adequate accommodation in the Soviet rest-homes for everyone who would like to go. Actually, some two million people a year are spending holidays in rest-homes at the present time, but this is still under 10 per cent of the wage-earning population. On the other hand, however, it would be quite mistaken to assume that the two million that go to rest-homes are the only Soviet citizens who enjoy a holiday away from home. The O.P.T.E. caters for about two million holiday-makers a year, in addition to those who spend their holidays in rest-homes.

Further, there are hundreds of thousands of Soviet workers, and possibly millions, who travel somewhere on their own, through no special organization, during their holiday time. Finally, we must realize that in the U.S.S.R. where the number of industrial workers has been more than doubled in a few years there is a very close connexion between the workers and the peasantry. A considerable majority of the Soviet industrial population still have intimate ties with the villages and a country cottage as well as accommodation in the towns. Very often one relative remains in the village when others go to town, and the old country home is used by the family during holiday time. Therefore, the two million that spend their holidays in rest-homes each year are only a small part of the total number of working people enjoying holidays out of town.

From Novii Afon I travelled by steamer back to Batum and thence to Tiflis and Erivan, the capitals of Soviet Georgia and Soviet Armenia respectively. Of all the places I visited on this trip, Erivan more than any other symbolizes for me the years of the first Five-Year Plan. This capital of Soviet Armenia, under the shadow of Mount Ararat, on which the Persian and Turkish border runs, was in course of reconstruction; or, looking at old Erivan, one might almost say, construction. I stayed for four days in Soviet Erivan and then found my way northwards, by Tiflis and the Georgian military road, the oil-fields of Grozny, Kharkov and the biggest dam of the first Five-Year Plan, Dnieprostroi. But of all these places the sharp contrast of the new and old was nowhere so clear as in Erivan.

## CHAPTER IX

### ERIVAN TO DNEIPROSTROI

As the train meandered through the mountains from Tiflis to Erivan the usual kind of conversation began in our compartment. For some time a peasant had been looking at my thick English walking shoes—(never, in the U.S.S.R., did I cease to use English shoes, any more than I would replace them by French shoes if living in France—and, after some time, asked me in what part of the country I had bought them. When I said “England,” it required a little explanation to bring home to him where England was. When I had made it clear that I was a foreigner I was immediately plied with questions as to how people lived “there,” whether there was really such a lot of unemployment, and how it could be so, seeing that they had such a high level of technique and could produce such wonderful shoes. Actually the ‘wonderful’ shoes had cost a price that few English working men would care to pay, a fact which I told my questioners. Interesting, too, that these same shoes had been severely criticized in Moscow by a number of Russian friends as both clumsy and inelegant; I suppose that nowhere else in the world do men wear such heavy shoes for everyday affairs as in this country.

When I asked about things in Armenia I was told of the great projects of industrial construction that were now being undertaken. New hydro-electric stations, new factories; Erivan, Leninakhan and other towns were being completely reconstructed. “And the harvest?” I asked, having nowhere received favourable reports of the work in the fields. Alas, here too the harvest was a black spot on an otherwise friendly horizon; here too the

transition to collective large-scale agriculture was meeting with difficulties. But in spite of this there was clearly great enthusiasm for the building up of a new Soviet Armenia, and I understood this enthusiasm when I reached Erivan, a city in the making.

To the south, Mount Ararat stands mauve against a cloudless sky with just a few traces of snow on the higher of its two peaks. On all sides dry hills stretch far away to the horizon. Round Erivan itself there are green vineyards, for there is water here, drawn from the river that runs past one side of the town. The casual British visitor to Iran or Turkey is struck by the 'picturesque' houses of the 'natives'; flat-roofed mud-huts, without even a chimney, built higgledy-piggledy along the sides of tracks on the steep slopes of hill-sides. But not one of these visitors would ever dream of personally living in such conditions. And the same visitors usually deeply resent any attempt to pull down the picturesque old dwellings and replace them with new blocks of modern flats. In Erivan the contrast between old and new was particularly vivid. On a hillside, with a magnificent view of Mount Ararat, was the old town of one-storey mud huts, some of them half underground. But even here I found a contrast that showed the trend of events. Among the mud-huts stood an electrical transformer, bringing electric light even to these backward dwellings. I could repeat the words of Sir Walter Citrine on his travels in the U.S.S.R. that "every place we have visited so far, whether it be a farm or a worker's dwelling, had electric light installed, and generously used because it was so cheap."<sup>1</sup>

In the centre of what was to become the new Erivan the roads were up, and, across piles of debris and building materials, a triumphal arch had been erected at the entrance to Erivan's main boulevard. On the right were new offices; on the left, a four-storey building under construction; and behind, the entrance to a park, at one time the

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 219.

private garden of one of the richest men in old Erivan.

Alongside the railway a number of new factories had already been completed since 1928, and I spent a day visiting these factories. The workers, mainly Armenians, came from all countries of the world to which Armenians had emigrated before the Revolution. Also, there were a number of Greeks and Turks, Iranians and Jews, who had immigrated not so long before. Asked how they liked Soviet Armenia, everyone that I spoke to was favourable, as compared with the conditions they had left behind them in Greece, Turkey and other Black Sea and Mediterranean countries. This was in 1932, and as I have already shown it was in no way a favourable year for the U.S.S.R.

One of the foremen at one of the factories invited me to come to his flat in the evening. He, like others, had lived in a one-roomed flat-roofed mud-hut till a year or so ago. Now he and his family, wife and two daughters, had a bright two-roomed flat with its own kitchen on the ground floor of one of the new blocks. And there were a number of such new blocks, plastered in various colours, red, blue and green, in pastel shades, making the new Erivan workers' dwellings quite the most attractive that I had seen during my travels. Of course, there were still far from enough of them, but building was continuing everywhere.

I was told at the tourist base that I must certainly pay a visit to Etchmiatzin, famous for its old monastery and cathedral, the religious capital of Armenia. There was a bus service from Erivan, so I went there for a day to view the cathedral, look round the monastery, and form an impression. Etchmiatzin was not, like Erivan, a city in the course of reconstruction. In its external appearance it cannot much have differed from the same town twenty or forty years previously, except that the number of monks had considerably declined in the period since the Revolution. While waiting for the bus I met a young scientist, occupied on archaeological research in the neighbourhood,

who was living temporarily in the tower of a church where he had quite a presentable little room. He took the trouble to show me round, and one passage in our conversation will not easily escape my memory.

I was asking about the monastery and whether the people were as religious as they used to be. He casually remarked that religion had greatly lost its influence now-a-days, and that "even the monks themselves now don't all believe in God." "Then why," I asked, "do they remain monks?" "Ah well, you see, there are many Armenians living abroad who still believe in God, and send money to keep the monastery going!"

This story was particularly significant at that time when foreign currency could purchase things in *Torgsin* at far lower prices than in the ordinary shops. It was amusing to reflect that a number of Armenian monks were continuing their life in a monastery in "godless U.S.S.R." because of the Government's policy of letting them receive *Torgsin* money from their fellow-believers in other countries. Since the closing of the *Torgsin* shops it is possible that many of these monks may have taken to useful work.

I must not mention *Torgsin* without explaining this ingenious form of State-trading which rose to its zenith during the period of the first Five-Year Plan. During this period there were many foreigners working in the U.S.S.R. There were also foreign tourists, and, as the existing rate of exchange was extremely unfavourable to foreigners, a special State trust for trade with foreigners was formed called *Torgsin*, an abbreviation of the Russian words meaning 'trade with foreigners.' At *Torgsin* it was possible to purchase goods with foreign currency at specially favourable prices and even to obtain certain things—often imported specially for *Torgsin* sale—which were not available in the ordinary shops at all. Though the new type of shop was first opened only for trade with tourists, its custom rapidly developed, extending to all foreigners who had foreign currency, and then, bit by bit, to all Soviet citizens who received presents in money

from relatives abroad. Finally, when the success of this particular form of trade had established itself as a means of raising foreign currency (a sort of internal export trade as far as the State was concerned), Torgsin started to accept gold, silver and precious stones, as these, like foreign currency, were invaluable means by which the State could meet its obligations abroad.

Such an institution as Torgsin would doubtless not have developed except as a result of certain peculiar conditions of this period. The Soviet Government was importing large quantities of machinery, essential to the fulfilment of its plans. The world market was suffering from the crisis, and the exports, to pay for the necessary imports, had to be increased as a result. Foreign credit was only grudgingly granted to the U.S.S.R., and large long-term loans were out of the question. Therefore, in the urgent need to mobilize all possible sources of foreign currency, Torgsin developed into a flourishing concern. Then, as the urgency to pay for imports diminished, and the private supplies of gold and silver within the country declined, at a certain point Torgsin was 'liquidated' by government decree, its shops automatically being taken over by the Commissariat for Home Trade.

Much has been made by Eugene Lyons and other critics of the rôle of Torgsin during the food difficulties of 1932 and 1933. Looked at from a utopian sentimentalist standpoint, or from the point of view of an ordinary citizen who had no foreign currency, it certainly was not pleasant at that time to know that one could not purchase anything at the best stocked shops. One certainly felt rather the same as the ordinary working man or woman feels when to-day in London they look with envy into the windows of the more expensive establishments. Was the Soviet Government right, in these difficult years, in supplying such shops with goods for "internal export" knowing that resentment would naturally be felt by every citizen who could not purchase them? Such a question cannot be answered purely from the standpoint of those Soviet

citizens who could or could not purchase at Torgsin. For the Torgsin policy was a much wider one; it was part of a policy of importing necessities vital in the long run; the material means of raising the standard of life of a hundred and seventy million people; while paying for those necessities by raising, in every possible way, the necessary supplies of foreign currency. It was a trading device which in its immediate incidence was certainly inequitable, but which provided the only basis for equity in the long run, a higher level of the productive forces of the U.S.S.R. As one who very rarely purchased anything in Torgsin, my own view is that the average Russian was far less embittered that some people could purchase at Torgsin than the average British worker is embittered that some people can purchase goods at Selfridges, Fullers, or eat at Simpsons. They were far less embittered, because they knew that Torgsin was temporary and served a socially useful purpose, whereas no working person in Britain to-day can see a socially useful purpose in permanently selling high quality luxuries to a small proportion of the population while many necessities are still lacking to the mass of the people.

In the U.S.S.R. the possession of foreign currency was as much an accident as the inheritance of large unearned fortunes is in this country to-day. In both cases, because of advantages, as a rule in no way connected with their personal work for the community, certain individuals enjoyed certain privileges. But in the case of Torgsin the privilege was only temporary, since stocks of gold and silver dwindle away when spent, whereas stocks and shares, if their owners are lucky, remain. And the purpose of Torgsin was clearly in the social interest, while the same cannot be said of perpetuating unearned incomes from stocks and shares.

Eugene Lyons in *Assignment in Utopia*, makes much of certain stories of horrible tortures by the G.P.U. to extract foreign currency, gold and silver, from Soviet citizens. Personally, when in the U.S.S.R. I never heard from a

Soviet citizen any such story ; though I did hear of these 'tortures' from an Englishman who had heard them from Eugene Lyons. Two recent books on the G.P.U., one by Ivan Solonevich<sup>1</sup> whose "present occupation" consists of "anti-Soviet activities," and another by Maurice Edelman, *G.P.U. 'Justice*, give first-hand accounts of how people have been treated when arrested by the G.P.U. In neither of these books is there any suggestion of deliberate atrocities of any kind, though Solonevich alleges callous treatment when prisoners were being transported long distances by rail. These first-hand accounts, one of which is openly hostile, give no credence to the torture stories such as Lyons retails in considerable detail. And I have personally met Russians who have served time, and whose relatives have been held for examination. In none of these cases have I heard a single story of torture or serious maltreatment of prisoners. Of course, some prison officials are doubtless harder hearted than others in the U.S.S.R. as elsewhere. Isolated cases of deliberate maltreatment may arise, but all the evidence that I have had goes to show that any such maltreatment of prisoners is accidental, and contrary to, not part of, the Soviet prison system.

While in Erivan I came nearer than at any other time in my life to becoming a film star ! One evening on my way back to the tourist base a young man came up to me, asked me if I lived in Erivan, and said that I had just the face that they were wanting for a new film ! I told him that I was an Englishman on holiday, which seemed considerably to increase his enthusiasm. I was asked to call the next morning at the office of the Armenian film trust. After an hour or so of waiting while the producer liberated himself from another job, I was looked at—feeling rather like an animal in a show—and it was decided to try me. Apparently the part for which my looks had cast me was that of a young peasant leader of a partisan

<sup>1</sup> See page 224.

detachment in a film of the Civil War. This had a particular appeal to them, because the film was about the war against British intervention, and the idea that a British citizen should play the part of the peasant leader strongly appealed to the imagination, mine as well as theirs.

The main thing, it appeared, was that I should be able to creep round the walls of houses with a revolver in my hand and look sufficiently brave and fierce while sniping at the enemy. I was rehearsed for about an hour; but, try as I might, I did not give the producer the satisfaction of feeling that I was quite suited to the part. In spite of long hair, moustache, and rather unshaved appearance, when it came to scouting round the corner of houses to surprise the enemy I apparently still showed too great signs of British academic detachment, and, after an hour's trial I was told that they "would let me know." But I knew already that the producer was definitely not enchanted by my performance!

However, I had my consolation. A film was in course of production (also about the British intervention) in which Indian troops were to be portrayed in occupation of Erivan. So I was commissioned to be an Indian soldier, and stayed up a whole night for the purpose. My act was a simple one. I was to stand on sentry duty outside a building which had brass plate on the door labelled "English Headquarters." I had to march up and down once or twice, and, as a loving couple passed by, I was to turn my head ever so slightly and smile to myself. After one or two attempts the act was apparently adequate, and I was 'shot' twice on this little scene. What the rest of the film was like I do not know. I was promised photographs of my scene but they never arrived. Perhaps, even to this day, there is a film circulating in the U.S.S.R. in which I participate as an Indian soldier in the army of intervention. I don't know.

But talking about photographs; I at any rate *do* know that I appear in *U.S.S.R. in Construction*. In that publication there is a two-page photograph of the crowd

at the opening of the Dnieprostroi Dam, which we are coming to in a moment. In the middle of that crowd I am clearly visible, just as I was on that tour, and hardly distinguishable from the rest of the crowd except for the black hair and moustache which attracted the film producers of Erivan!

On my way back north I stopped at Tiflis, capital of Soviet Georgia. Here again, but less sharply than in Erivan, was a sharp contrast of old and new; but there was not the same ubiquitous reconstruction such as struck the visitor to Erivan even in the centre of the city. Whereas Erivan was just building its main boulevards, Tiflis had a main thoroughfare that had been laid out before the Revolution. And even the old art of Tiflis, with its wooden houses three or four stories high, did not appear so primitive as the one-floor mud-huts of old Erivan.

The shops of Tiflis at this time compared very favourably with those of Moscow and the more northerly parts of the Union. In Moscow, where things were rationed and the rationed amount was not always available, shop windows were only too often stocked with red bunting and portraits of Lenin. Wooden cheeses at this time also played a prominent part in the window of shops selling food. (I have always had a secret longing: to know the production figures for wooden cheeses and artificial palm-trees during the first Five-Year Plan. And what do these factories produce now that real cheese has driven out the false, and real palm-trees from the south are replacing the artificial ones in Soviet public buildings?) But in Tiflis, though rationing was in force here as elsewhere there appeared to be considerably greater supplies, certainly of food-stuffs, and the shop windows had an appearance only attained in Moscow by the end of 1933 and the beginning of 1934.

From Tiflis I travelled north by motor-coach over the Georgian military road—one of the finest motor drives in European U.S.S.R., and certainly among the finest in Europe. In one day's motoring you travel from Tiflis

to Ordjonikidze, from the south to the north of the Caucasus range, passing by Mount Kasbek and other high peaks. Along this road there are a number of O.P.T.E., tourist bases, and it is a most popular haunt during holiday time for people from all over the U.S.S.R.

From Ordjonikidze I went on to Grozny, a new oil town developed considerably during the Five-Year Plan. At the wells here there were Americans working, and I had conversations with American engineers. One of them had been working there for some time, and though the oil industry was over-fulfilling its planned output and was considered to be one of the leading industries in the country as far as efficiency was concerned, he was far from satisfied with the way it was being run. At that time his criticism was that tremendous waste was allowed to go on unchecked. Oil was being wasted, by-products were not being refined as they should be, resources were running to waste. Also, he had had some unfortunate experience with the treatment of an imported cracking plant from the U.S.A. The plant was suffering from wear and tear to a much greater extent than would ever be allowed in the U.S.A., and he complained bitterly that in a few years the equipment would be ruined.

Such complaints were common from foreigners working in the U.S.S.R. during that period, and to a less extent are heard even to-day. In practically every sphere of industry new machinery was being imported, the latest methods from abroad were being introduced, and foreign specialists came to put the new equipment in working order. But this was not easy. The Russians and other workers of the Soviet republics were not accustomed to such machinery; there was in many cases a natural distrust of foreign engineers because of the active hostility of their governments towards the U.S.S.R., and it often happened that the foreign expert found his advice being steadily ignored. Facts that have come to light since those years tend to show that there were many conscious attempts in official quarters deliberately to ensure

that the advice of foreign specialists was ignored as a means of weakening Soviet industry. The American engineer Littlepage's revealing experiences, described in the *Saturday Evening Post*, published in confirmation of the findings of the Piatakov trial, show us to-day that what many of us thought to be a natural result of the backwardness of the country in assimilating new machinery was not entirely what it seemed. The very fact that the workers were inexperienced, that many of them came direct from the peasantry and had no experience whatever of modern mechanical methods, and the natural suspicion on the part of Soviet officials and workers towards foreign engineers, were taken by us to explain many of the inefficiencies and practical difficulties of that time. To-day, looking back on that period, and with the evidence of a number of important trials at our disposal, it becomes clear that while those objective difficulties were responsible for much, they were being magnified by certain people in order deliberately to hold up the industrial development of the U.S.S.R. Official stubbornness in certain cases was purposely calculated to make plans go wrong, to destroy new machinery, and to hold up the industrial progress of the country.

From Grozny I returned through Kharkov to Dneprostroi, and thence to Moscow. Kharkov has one feature which is outstanding. This is the architectural ensemble that has been created on the Dzerzhinsky Square, with the Palace of Industry as its centre. At one end of what will be one of the largest public squares in the world there stands a gigantic building, or rather, a series of buildings, linked together by bridges at the fifth and even higher stories, which for beauty of design and lightness of structure is one of the finest creations of post-war architecture. Incidentally, it is about the only example in the U.S.S.R. of a really successful, a veritably outstanding achievement in modern architectural design. And, beside this great new building, certain old buildings have been reconditioned, and other new structures have arisen. In

1932 only the main block was complete. In 1936 when I was in Kharkov the number of buildings round this Square had considerably increased, but the job was not yet completed in its entirety. From the architectural point of view more satisfactory buildings seemed to have been built in Kharkov than in Moscow or Leningrad prior to 1932. It is worthy of a visit because of its new buildings alone.

From Kharkov I went on to Dnieprostroi, and happened to arrive just in time for the official opening. As it happened there was a special excursion of foreign newspaper correspondents to Dnieprostroi for the occasion, an occasion which has since been commemorated in more than one book about this period in the U.S.S.R. Here is a description from Eugene Lyons' *Assignment in Utopia* giving an impression of this excursion and the general condition of the country at this time :

Food difficulties in southern Russia were fast reaching famine proportions. Ruthlessness in killing doses was, therefore, prescribed for the Ukraine and Northern Caucasus, an area with some forty million inhabitants, the area of "100 per cent collectivization." ...We talked of little else than the hunger and terror about which we did not write, or wrote in misty circumlocutions. . . .

Against this background of muted despair, the celebration of the official opening of Dnieprostroi, in the heart of the district soon to be devastated by man-made famine, had an edge of the grotesque. Several car-loads of foreigners and high government officials went in a special train from Moscow to the new hydro-electric station. Practically all the resident foreign correspondents, and a batch arrived on special assignment, were in our party.<sup>1</sup>

Lyons then goes on to refer to "the insanity of a junket to hungerland, the correspondents chaperoned by official hallelujah-shouters, to dedicate a mechanical mammoth among wheat-fields abandoned to weeds; of a holiday to glorify an electric station built in large part with coerced labour and producing electric power for factories not yet

<sup>1</sup> Eugene Lyons, *Assignment in Utopia* (Harrap), pp. 541-2.

'in existence.'<sup>1</sup>

This passage by Eugene Lyons is interesting, for it shows in a concentrated form all the bitterness of one who discovered on reaching the U.S.S.R. that it was not a Utopia. First of all, on his description of the food difficulties. Now I had been travelling continuously for nearly three months in "southern Russia" before I arrived at Dneprostroi. And everywhere I heard complaints about the harvest, inefficient farming and the fact that it would be a hard winter because there would be very little bread. But on no occasion did I hear it suggested that the situation was anything like as bad as in a year of small harvest prior to the Revolution, and never did I hear it suggested that conditions were anything approaching as bad as in the famine year of 1921. The mass of the people, accustomed throughout their history to harvest failures and famines, regarded the situation in 1932 as serious but not as bad as what they had experienced in the past. And, like my peasant on the edge of the Black Sea, most of them considered that "we"—that is, they themselves—were to blame. The suggestion by Lyons that "ruthlessness in killing doses was, therefore, prescribed" is a travesty of the whole situation. Given a bad harvest, given the fact that even in 1932 there was still a small minority of peasants actively working, openly and secretly, for the disruption of the collective farms, ruthless measures were as necessary as they were ten years earlier in the war against intervention. While tremendous hardship resulted I am personally convinced from my travels in the U.S.S.R. at that time that mass support for the Government was greater, not less, than it must have been in those critical years from 1918 to 1921. People were faced with difficulties, the food problem was acute, but they recognized that their own lack of discipline and energy was as much to blame as any government policy. I have already in a previous chapter commented on a conversation of peasant women in a

<sup>1</sup> Eugene Lyons, *Assignment in Utopia* (Harrap), p. 543.

train in which they blamed not the Government, not Stalin, but their own husbands for not working properly in the fields since the formation of the collective farms.

When Eugene Lyons refers to "man-made famine" he completely distorts the picture. Neither the Soviet Government nor the mass of the peasants had wanted a food shortage. Certain elements, however, did deliberately plot to bring about famine conditions. These were the rich peasants, supported by politicians who still opposed the Soviet Government and its policy, and agents deliberately sent into the U.S.S.R. from outside to stir up discontent. These forces acting together, in addition to the inexperience of the peasants themselves at disciplined collective work and modern farming methods, led to a food crisis, the greatest since 1921.

When Lyons jeers at the construction of "an electric station built in large part with coerced labour and producing electric power for factories not yet in existence" he is still further distorting the issue. First of all, no factories in that area could be operated at all without a source of power. The electric station had, therefore, to be in working order before the completion of the factories or the factories would have had to await the completion of the station. When Lyons refers to "factories not yet in existence" he is misleading the reader. New factories were already in existence at the time of our visit, though not yet in full working order. We spent an afternoon visiting such new plants. On the other hand, however, we did not find any plant in full working order. In a great new works, just built, we found a few workers hanging about in each workshop. We were told it was the 'free day.' To amuse the foreigners a group of three young workers started putting pieces of metal in a small furnace and then dipping them in water to give the impression that something was going on. In the meantime a man in a crane high above our heads was pointing at them and winking at us in a way that destroyed any belief on the part of the visitors that serious work was in progress. But the

building was there, and some months later work began seriously.

Too often have gibes been made by foreigners in the U.S.S.R. at the opening of new enterprises before they are in full working order. Not only does this happen in the U.S.S.R. but in our own country as well. I can imagine certain foreigners, having seen a ship launched in the U.S.S.R., jeering because it did not at once sail away under its own steam. It is the same thing with factories and electric stations. In Britain as well as in the U.S.S.R. the official opening day is not usually the day on which any new enterprise starts to work at full capacity.

The return journey to Moscow in the special train which brought Government officials and foreign correspondents to the opening of Dnieprostroi, was my only experience of close personal contact with the correspondents of foreign newspapers in Moscow as a collective group. Strangely enough I never met Eugene Lyons personally, though I spent much time in the company of Malcolm Muggeridge, who was then correspondent for the *Manchester Guardian*. As far as I remember, Muggeridge spent that journey alternatively in the company of Chollerton of the *Daily Telegraph* and Eugene Lyons, who regaled him with atrocity stories, famine stories, and stories of G.P.U. tortures; and the rest of the time with myself and certain others who were more friendly in their attitude to the U.S.S.R., even in the face of severe difficulties in the countryside. Together with Muggeridge, there was John Hughes, an English journalist who only a few weeks later was killed in my presence in a tramcar accident. Getting on a tram late at night, being afraid of missing the last tram home, John fell, and the tram passed over one leg. The ambulance was quick in coming, but loss of blood was too great for him to recover.

I well remember Mr. Chollerton, with his flashing eyes and dark beard, gleefully retailing one story after another of cases of graft and bureaucracy with which he had personally come in contact. Malcolm Muggeridge is

described by Lyons as one of the "most gullible on this journey," meaning one of those least ready to accept stories about the collapse of the Soviet régime. My own experience was the reverse of this, for on that journey I found Muggeridge consistently condemning everything Soviet with that same "bitterness of his brilliant book" which is praised by Lyons, and which, as Lyons said, was written as "a revenge against his own imported certainties."<sup>1</sup> Muggeridge, like Lyons, entered the U.S.S.R. with no conception of the problems being tackled in that vast country, and expected, I think, to find something like what England would be after twenty years of peaceful socialist development. Such people were rapidly disillusioned; and even to-day are likely to be disillusioned and possibly for some years to come.

And I must confess that I, too, at that time, was far from happy about the food situation. Lyons and Muggeridge undoubtedly exaggerate the position and attribute the lowest motives to a Government which was doing its utmost to cope with a very difficult problem. But the fact remains that there was a very bad harvest, a food shortage, and conditions almost of civil war in certain districts where the peasants revolted under the leadership of the enemies of collectivization. It is only more recently, in the trials of the past two years, that facts have been brought to light showing that even high up in the Soviet State there were small groups of individuals deliberately working to foster such revolts in those years. It has now been made clear that during that period the enemies of the State were not only the rich peasants but in a number of cases State officials who, in their professed struggle against the *kulaks*, did their utmost to cause antagonism between the peasants and State, thus lessening the prestige of the Soviet State among the peasantry.

Having travelled on my own for several months, having come face to face with the difficulties as well as

<sup>1</sup> Eugene Lyons, *Assignment in Utopia* (Harrap), p. 543.

the achievements of this period, it was not inspiring to return to Moscow with a group of foreign correspondents most of whom were bitterly hostile to the U. S. S. R., and whose conversation in the main reflected this bitterness. And while we were all agreed as to the acuteness of the food situation, I found that there was a fundamental barrier between us. They had none of them experienced the day-to-day life and work of a Soviet institution whereas I had been working with the younger generation in the Soviet educational system and knew the Soviet people in their ordinary working lives. What is more, I found that most of these correspondents, though living in a country where the factory had become a centre of civic life as well as a place of work, were no more interested in factories and factory conditions than they would have been in their own country. One of these correspondents, who has since published a most embittered attack on the U. S. S. R. spent his time in Moscow writing a book about England. He sat and worked in a little flat in Moscow, his contact with the Soviet world consisted in conversations with a domestic worker from a distant village, and when on one occasion, I suggested to him that it was the life of the working people in the factories that was the basis of the new system he angrily exclaimed: "I'm not interested in factories," thus showing his constitutional incapacity ever to understand what was really happening on Soviet territory.

Arrived once more in Moscow I worked for three months as a free-lance teacher, taking private pupils but not working in any organization. At the end of the year I returned to England to make contrasts between conditions in the U. S. S. R. as I had seen them and conditions in England as they would now appear to me after a year and a quarter of continuous living in the U. S. S. R.

## CHAPTER X

### PERSPECTIVE FROM ENGLAND

I returned to London just before the beginning of 1933. At the time of leaving I had strongly mixed feelings about life in the U. S. S. R. On the one hand, I was more than impressed by many of the very great achievements that had been accomplished. The working people appeared to me to be better off than their fellow-workers in Britain in a number of vital respects. There was no unemployment in the U. S. S. R., every man and woman was, therefore, secure. There was an admirable system of social insurance, by which all workers off work through illness received their pay from the social insurance fund. In the case of women, benefits extended to four months' full pay when off work through child-bearing, this period being extended on doctor's orders. All working people, irrespective of sex or age, receive the same pay for similar work. This, I felt, was a particularly great achievement as far as the women and young workers were concerned. Then, again, the hours of work were only seven a day, with paid holidays of at least two weeks a year for all workers. In these respects at any rate the workers of the U. S. S. R. could rightly claim to enjoy conditions better than in any other country of the world.

On the other hand, in certain respects the U. S. S. R. was particularly depressing in 1932. Especially, of course, with regard to the food situation, which was bad, and which showed no signs of improving until the harvest of 1933, and even then an improvement was in no way guaranteed. I left the U. S. S. R. in December 1932 at a time of strict rationing, when even the goods allotted on

the ration-card were not always available. The basic diet of bread and tea and cabbage-soup was guaranteed, but everything in addition to this was, to some extent, a luxury, supplies of which were never constant. Another negative feature was housing, a problem in the solution of which the Soviet Union was still far behind Britain, and one that showed no signs of being solved in under ten years at least. Finally there was the question of clothing—for in quality, if not in warmth, the clothes of the people of the U.S.S.R. in 1932 certainly compared unfavourably with Britain at that time. To what extent did these negative features offset the positive ones? To what extent were the positive features no longer of account because these negative features had more than offset them? These questions were still unanswered by me when I left Moscow for London on December 26, 1932.

Fortunately I have preserved from that time certain impressions written on arriving in London after spending a year in Moscow. Soon after my arrival I had an opportunity to travel about the country, and to make comparisons and contrasts with my journey through the U.S.S.R. during the previous autumn. In the course of this time I was able to see the U.S.S.R. more in perspective than had ever been possible when I was on Soviet territory. I give here some of the experiences, comparisons and conclusions which followed my departure from the U.S.S.R. at that time.

My first impression on crossing the frontier on my way back to London was the servility of the waiter in the Polish restaurant, together with the vast stocks of food for sale. In Moscow the waiters in restaurants were far from efficient, but they were never servile. And now I found a waiter in tailcoat, bowing and scraping before me, dusting the seat that I was to sit upon with a snow-white table napkin, and, in fact, begging for a tip. I did not like it. And then, in the train, travelling through Poland, the attendant comes along, there is more obsequious bowing and scraping. "Are you all right, sir?—Nice

carriage, sir; I shall be travelling with you, sir," and more begging for tips! In the U.S.S.R. the attendants in the train had been very friendly, they brought mattresses and made up beds for a fixed payment, they chatted about the weather, the food shortage, or about the Five-Year Plan, or about the time of arrival of the train. But never did they bow or scrape, never did they do their job with one eye on that trouser-pocket from which a tip at some stage might be expected to emerge. In the Soviet trains everything was a little grimy; in place of snow-white napkins in the dining-car the cloths were a little soiled; and yet, I found I preferred the rough and ready friendship of the Soviet attendants to this servility. The servility shocked me. I had not realized previously that it existed.

In London, perhaps, I was most struck in the first instance by the quantity of goods for sale. In every shop stocks and stocks of goods, in contrast to Moscow where every new consignment was immediately bought up. Why were the stocks allowed to lie in the London shops for so long? Looking at the people I could see the reason was not that everyone had sufficient of everything that was on sale; for there were people who were obviously poor, and I was amazed one evening to see in Southampton Row an old man digging in a dust-bin for something to eat! When, later on, I mentioned this to some working people, a hotel employee told me how, outside the big hotels in London, old people every night salvage provisions from the dust-bins. And yet visitors to the U.S.S.R. where there was an acute food shortage were commenting on such things happening as if they only happened on the territory of the Soviet Union! Which, I asked myself, was the greater crime: to have stocks of goods available and people salvaging food from dust-bins because of their poverty, or to level everyone down to a certain degree of sacrifice because there were not enough supplies to go round? Which was the better system, one which allowed milk to be made into buttons while malnutrition was publicly admitted, or a system in which every drop of

milk was being used as food, while every possible thing was being done to increase the supplies of milk? These questions—questions which had never occurred to me in the U.S.S.R.—now crowded through my mind.

Then again, with regard to housing. In Moscow there was gross overcrowding: I knew that from experience. But so there was in London, and soon after returning I read an article, I think it was in the *Spectator*, about crowded basements in the borough of Westminster where twelve people lived in one room. Now in Moscow if you wanted more space you could not get it, because there was none to spare. Nowhere in Moscow could you ever see a sign "Flat to be Let;" a flat standing empty till some landlord obtained the rent that he considered satisfactory. Yet in London, within a few hundred yards of every overcrowded house or basement you could find flats to be let, standing empty, unoccupied. It was contrasts of this kind which struck me on returning to London at the end of 1932, at a time when in the U.S.S.R. things were far from satisfactory.

Then as regards women. I have told how on passing through Poland the servility of waiters and train attendants struck me. In London, I noticed, there was something more than servility on the part of waitresses and women shop assistants. It was suddenly borne home to me that in Britain women met men primarily conscious of themselves as *women*; whereas in Moscow they confront one simply as *citizens*. And, looking at people in the streets, one noted a certain lack of character and purpose about them, even though they were considerably better dressed than in Moscow. But, even with regard to dress, certain things struck me. In the centre of London—for example, in Trafalgar Square—I saw several men literally freezing with the cold. Nothing to keep them warm but worn old mackintoshes. In Moscow the quality of the clothing did not come up to London's smartness; but never once, while living there, have I seen a person in the street who was not sufficiently warmly clad.

Foreign visitors to Moscow frequently remark that the theatre there is all propaganda. They say this in spite of the fact that Moscow's theatres show more of the world's classics than the theatres of any other capital. I was interested to sample once again what the London theatre world provides. And I saw a 'revue.' It was not, of course, political propaganda—it was sexual propaganda, in which some scores of women advertised their legs, thighs, and breasts for some three hours on end. I had seen that kind of thing before, and it had never shocked me. Now, after a year in Moscow, I was shocked. Such sexual displays are not staged in the State theatres of the U.S.S.R. This is one of the effects of State censorship. A healthy theatre is the result. And it is well worth remembering that many of those London chorus girls who display their legs so beautifully on the stage when they are in luck and have a job are constrained to sell their leg in another way when they are not in luck and have no theatre job to keep them going; whereas in Moscow in the theatrical world, as elsewhere, there is no unemployment.

On several occasions I happened to pass through the centre of London late in the evening. I was accosted. This hadn't happened in Moscow. And then I started to travel about the country. And I very soon realized that London is not Britain; and that the prosperity of London appears like a flourishing oasis when compared with the destitute areas of Tyneside and South Wales; or with industrial centres like Manchester, or a seaport such as Liverpool. I shall never forget the impression of poverty which I received when arriving at Liverpool, and, on leaving the station, had several hungry-looking men clutching for my bag to earn a few coppers as unofficial porters. It gave me the same uncanny feeling that I experienced in London shortly after my return when I saw a procession of six able-bodied men, unemployed, walking down the gutter singing Welsh songs, while one of them collected from the public whatever they cared to give. Or, passing along one of London's main thoroughfares, seeing a man

sitting on the pavement, cap beside him, with a note pointing out that he had served his country during the Great War. Certain critics make much of the beggars in the U.S.S.R. But at any rate I can say, never in the U.S.S.R. did I see a beggar carrying such a sign as this : "1918-1921: I fought for the Soviets. This is what I am now."

While on Tyneside I happened to visit an unemployed centre, an untidy little shed in Jarrow where a few men daily mended their shoes and thus, I was told by the warden, preserved their self-respect. Much has been written of the degradation of the Russian peasant, but I was forced by circumstances to compare these British working men preserving their self-respect in Jarrow with the Russian peasant grumbling that there was going to be another bad harvest; and the greater self-respect I found, not in Jarrow-on-Tyne, but in the U.S.S.R.

And then the young people. One of the things that shocked me on returning to London was the dirtiness of the children in the working-class districts, and the fact that they were playing in the streets. In Moscow it was a rare thing to find children playing in the streets, and a rare thing to see children with dirty faces and that uncared-for look so common here. In Moscow, wherever there were children, little plots of waste land were being made into green playgrounds for them. Backyards of blocks of flats were being arranged so that the children could feel at home there. Every green square in the city was a *public square* ; large gardens had been thrown open to the children of the people. And then in London, children who in Moscow would be still at school were already working for a living. Children were employed as page-boys in expensive hotels, and with no limitation to their working day. Children ran errands for shopkeepers with no training for more skilled work, and their only prospect was that of being sacked at the age when they became insurable against unemployment. And, discharged just at the insurable age, they could not even hope to obtain

the meagre insurance benefits which older workers enjoyed. And in Moscow, in contrast: the prohibition of the employment of juveniles, school to the age of 17 or 18, even though it did mean working every school building for two shifts. Which of these, I asked myself, was the civilization of the future?

It may be noted by the reader that so far in my reactions to British conditions on my return from the U.S.S.R. I compared the U.S.S.R. with Britain. But in doing this I now recognized I was paying the greatest unsolicited testimonial to the U.S.S.R. And if every enemy of the Soviet Union who to-day unblushingly compares Moscow and London realized the significance of this, such comparisons would forthwith cease. For who before 1917 ever dreamt of comparing, detail by detail, Moscow with London? Nobody ever dreamt of doing such a thing, any more than they compare the workers' living conditions in Bombay and London, Shanghai and London, or Tokio and London, at the present time. There is one irrefutable proof that the U.S.S.R.'s progress between 1917 and recent years is something phenomenal; it is that to-day Moscow can actually stand comparison with London, whereas before 1917 nobody ever dreamt of comparing a town in the Russian empire and one in Great Britain in the same breath. I must point out here that I made all my first comparisons between Moscow and London before I realized the historical outrage that I was committing in so doing.

When I went to the U.S.S.R. in 1931 I had no more knowledge of tsarist Russia than the ordinary Englishman has to-day of India or China; and if anything, considerably less. For, while India and China exist to-day in the contemporary world, and, therefore, do find some reflection in our Press, tsarist Russia has been dead since 1917—dead, and almost forgotten. My own reactions on Soviet territory, like those of most visitors, were automatically to compare Moscow with London, the U.S.S.R. with Britain, and draw conclusions accordingly. And, as

shown here, my conclusions were substantially favourable to the U.S.S.R.'s social *system*, while recognizing that in many respects it still fell short of what had been attained in other countries which had a hundred years of industrialization to their credit. It is interesting to note that some of the most hostile critics of the U.S.S.R. in their less critical moments pay unexpected tributes to the Soviet system precisely along these lines. André Gide, in a moment of speculation "wonders what a Soviet régime might not succeed in doing if it had workmen like ours, with their French temperament, their zeal, their conscientiousness, and their education."<sup>1</sup> And Sir Water Citrine in the course of his *Search for Truth* repeats the very revealing remark of the American who said: "You know, I am not a Communist. I do not stand for these fellows at all, but if we had this system in America, I am darned if I do not think we could make it work."<sup>2</sup>

Thus from two independent people, both very critical of the U.S.S.R., we find the view expressed that in more advanced countries like the U.S.A. and France the 'system' could be made to work more satisfactorily than in Russia. But Russia in 1917 was a country to be classed with China, Japan, and India. To-day it already challenges comparison with the advanced countries of the West. This in itself is the answer to all who try to belittle the Soviet system on the basis of certain features of Russia to-day which are still backward compared with Britain.

Now when I returned to London in 1933, I did not at first realize all this. I calmly made my comparisons between Moscow and London. And it was only in the course of time on meeting individuals who had known tsarist Russia at first hand that I myself began to appreciate fully the progress achieved in the short period of fifteen years. It was only after I had made my comparisons with the Britain of to-day that I began to read accounts of con-

<sup>1</sup> Gide, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

<sup>2</sup> Citrine, *op. cit.*, p. 127.

ditions in tsarist Russia and become fully aware of the achievements of the Revolution. And, in order that readers may make their own comparisons, I am going to note some of the eye-witnesses—not people without an understanding of Russian, but people who knew Russia and the Russian language under the old régime.

The correspondent of the *Daily Telegraph* in Russia prior to 1917 was a certain E. J. Dillon. In 1928 he returned to the U.S.S.R. on a visit, and in these words he sums up his impressions :

Outsiders cannot realize the vastness of the upheaval effected by the October Revolution. One must have lived and worked in the land under the tsarist régime, and one must have resided there again after the upheaval in order to compare usefully the two states. What happened in October 1917 was not merely the substitution of one government for another, or one set of institutions for another. It was a sweeping organic change in every branch of life, public and private, in the reciprocal relations of persons and groups, in laws, in ethics, in education, social aims, land-tenure, and in the people's outlook upon life and death.<sup>1</sup>

On arriving in Leningrad after more than ten years absence, Dillon was struck, like many foreign visitors, by the somewhat drab look of this once gaudily decorated city. "The stucco of the buildings, many of which were erected by Italian architects, and were from the outset wholly unsuited to the Northern climate, is rapidly peeling off....." But on the other hand, certain favourable features were also immediately noticeable: "One of the first things that claimed my notice was the absence of beggars who in old times were always and everywhere with us. One of the few I now detected singled me out, followed me discreetly . . ."<sup>2</sup> And how often from foreigners visiting the U.S.S.R. for the first time, and even in my own case when I first went there, have I heard criticisms because in the U.S.S.R. under socialism there are 'still' beggars

<sup>1</sup> E. J. Dillon, *Russia To-day and Yesterday* (Dent), p. 105.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

on the streets. On this matter the reactions of Sir Bernard Pares are also of interest, for he too returned to the Soviet Union after years of absence. He too is struck, not by the *presence* but by the absence of beggars compared with tsarist Russia. "I might add," he writes on returning from Moscow in 1936, "that all the old signs of pauperism in Moscow—often so obtrusive, as for instance, the distorted and misshapen limbs that were stretched out to one by the beggars lying at the gates of the churches—have disappeared altogether."<sup>1</sup>

But perhaps the most illuminating picture of the position of tsarist Russia in this respect is painted by Stephen Graham, who knew Russia better than most Englishmen prior to 1917. In *A Vagabond in the Caucasus* (a book written in 1911) he describes conditions as he saw them when passing through Moscow :

At the Khitry market one may often see men and women with only one cotton garment between their bodies and the cruel cold. How they live is incomprehensible; they are certainly a different order of being from anything in England. And the beggars ! They say there are 50,000 of them. The city belongs to them; if the city rats own the drains, they own the streets. They are, moreover, an essential part of the city; they are in perfect harmony with it; take away the beggars and you would destroy something vital. . . . I have been told the beggars have nothing to fear from the authorities. The beggar is a holy institution; he keeps down the rate of wages in the factories; he is a pillar of the Church, for he continually suggests charity; he is necessary to the secret police—where else could they hide their spies ?<sup>2</sup>

And to-day, when foreigners by chance see a single stray example of this type of citizen, without 50,000 of whom Moscow would lose something 'vital,' they only too frequently use the presence of such a single survival of the past to criticize the new system. I know because I did it myself. I only learnt the truth after returning

<sup>1</sup> Sir Bernard Pares, *Moscow Admits a Critic* (Nelson), p. 42.

<sup>2</sup> Stephen Graham, *A Vagabond in the Caucasus* (John Lane), pp. 74-76.

to England and reading for the first time of the poverty of the people in tsarist Russia.

And then there is the question of 'housing'—always, and rightly, a matter for adverse comment by visitors from more advanced countries. But here again it is absolutely impossible to-day in the U.S.S.R. to imagine the kind of housing that existed under tsarism. Here, too, in 1911, Stephen Graham made a thorough exploration of the by-ways of Moscow with horrifying results. For example, here is a description of a doss-house which he visited at that time :

The doss-house was owned by a merchant who made a handsome profit out of it, I am told. So well he might ! The accommodation was *nil*. Straw to sleep upon. No chairs beyond three park seats. Two rooms lit by two jets of gas in each. A small lavatory that might even make a beggar faint. Men and women slept in the same room, though they were, for the most part, so degraded that it scarcely occurred to one that they were of different sex.<sup>1</sup>

And such a description, in this case of a doss-house, I have had confirmed from other quarters as quite accurate even for a very great part of the workers' 'barracks' attached to their place of work before the Revolution. In Moscow after my return in the middle of 1933, I heard something of pre-revolutionary workers' housing from a certain Miss Saunders, who worked for an English firm in Russia prior to 1917. She personally described to me dormitories built of egg-boxes in which men and women slept together on straw and boards—and this was for an English firm !

And yet when in Moscow between the autumn of 1931 and the end of 1932 I took the universal installation of electric-light for granted ! And I criticized severely if ever I saw a beggar, a drunkard, or a dirty toilet. But all the same such protests are right, not wrong ; because it is by such persistent protest that the Revolution is over-

<sup>1</sup> S. Graham, *A Vagabond in the Caucasus* (John Lane), p. 79.

coming these relics of the past at the present time.

We freely criticize the state of toilets in the U.S.S.R. But we do not always realize that the population of the towns has grown enormously of recent years, and there has been a vast immigration of unskilled peasants who had never used a toilet in their lives. Instead of doing as the French do and build toilets in which the citizen could only squat, the Soviet authorities rapidly introduced modern lavatories, with wooden seats. But, alas! the unaccustomed peasant would hop on to the seat and squat there like a parrot on a perch. I have actually seen in a Moscow building sloping boards placed above the lavatory seats so that there was room only to sit, not to squat. This is part of the 'cultural front' of Soviet development.

Then there is the question of drunkenness. This, too, is a matter of some significance, for visitors to Moscow, particularly during the first years of the first Five-Year Plan, were frequently horrified by the sight of an apparently unconscious citizen lying on the pavement, with nobody taking the slightest notice. The first time I saw such a sight I was rather taken aback. But on inquiry I was told that this was simply the effect of vodka, and that it happened much more often before the Revolution. On one occasion, I remember, I was sent a cutting from an English newspaper telling how two English ladies visiting Moscow saw a man lying in the street, weak from starvation. They stopped their Intourist car and tried to help the man. But to their horror a callous militiaman told them to go away and said that the 'corpse' was only suffering from drink. They did not believe it; the editor who printed their story apparently did not believe it either, but as one who has sampled vodka I can vouch for the truth of what the militiaman said. On our British beer it is customary to find one's way home, even if uncertainly; on Russian vodka it is not at all hard to go to sleep on the pavement with one's head in the gutter. Not, Dear Reader, that I ever got to that stage myself!

But here again a comparison with tsarist Russia is

informative. For while you or I are shocked at very occasionally seeing a Soviet citizen overcome with drink, the visitor who knew tsarist Russia is impressed in quite the reverse aspect. He misses that drunkenness which was so common in the olden times. Stephen Graham on one occasion asked a peasant how much vodka his village consumed. The peasant's reply was as follows: "No one knows—thousands of bottles; for even the priest is drunken. To-day even in the procession he was drunk; some people say he only keeps the holiday so that he can go to our houses and drink and not pay for it."<sup>1</sup> And then at Christmas, when Stephen Graham happened to be travelling on a railway journey, the engine-driver also celebrated even during the course of the journey. "At about three o'clock the engine-driver, who was so drunk that he could not stand up, was lifted into the engine and he set the train going."<sup>2</sup>

The consumption of vodka in tsarist Russia ran somewhat in inverse proportion to the amount spent on education. On this matter Dillon provides some enlightening facts. In *Russia To-day and Yesterday* he describes the case of a certain rural district:

An official report to which I had access narrated cases like the following: "In the entire Porkhovski district thirty pounds a year is spent in schools, six cantons contributing small sums to this total, and the remaining twenty-three subscribing nothing at all. In several villages of that district (I am speaking of places within two or three hours of the capital) there is *not a man, woman, or child who can read or write*, and every time an official document is received from the Peasant Board (or elsewhere) a special messenger has to be dispatched to a neighbouring town to seek for someone to decipher it." [Official report of G. P. Sazonoff] And yet in that same district there are *seven hundred taverns and public-houses with a yearly turnover of two million roubles.*<sup>3</sup>

In contrast with this, Soviet leaders have boasted that the production of vodka is the only thing that the

<sup>1</sup> Stephen Graham, *Undiscovered Russia* (John Lane), p. 117.

<sup>2</sup> *A Vagabond in the Caucasus*, p. 21.

<sup>3</sup> Dillon, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

Five-Year Plans have not increased; whereas the number of school-children has risen from round about eight million in tsarist Russia to over thirty million at the time of writing.

So far these quotations deal mainly with life in the towns. It is worth while here to add something on the village life of tsarist Russia, for to this day in Britain there are many people living, emigrants from the Russia of the tsars, who remember such conditions in all their horrible detail. It was one such person, a Jew living in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, who first drew my attention in 1933 to the conditions of life under tsarism in the rural areas.

E. J. Dillon, writing in the *Fortnightly Review* from 1889 to 1892 as E. B. Lanin, describes conditions then. It should be added here that, between 1892 and 1917 nothing was done fundamentally to alter the conditions of production and distribution in the Russian countryside.

Famine in Russia [wrote Lenin] is periodical like the snows, or rather it is perennial like the Siberian plague. To be scientifically accurate, one should distinguish two different varieties of it—the provincial and the national; the former termed *golodovka* or the little hunger, and the latter *golod* or the great hunger. Not a year ever elapses in which extreme distress in some province or provinces of the Empire does not assume the dimensions of a famine, while rarely a decade passes away in which the local misfortune does not ripen into the national calamity. . . .

But unless the famine area is large enough to affect very appreciably the corn exports, accounts of these *golodovkas* seldom find their way into the foreign Press, or else they are alluded to as instances of the kind of wild exaggeration indulged in by the enemies of Russia.

Famine in tsarist Russia then was as common as it is in India and China to-day, but it received little attention in our Press.

Since the Revolution of 1917 every sign of a recurrence of this pre-revolutionary malady has been headlined by our newspapers as a direct result of 'Bolshevism.' A striking illustration of the different approach to the question of food shortage in the U.S.S.R. and in neighbouring non-

Soviet territory was displayed in the *Observer* on November 6, 1933. On the subject of the Soviet Union the following passage appeared :

The shortage of food which has been chronic in Russia since the Five-Year Plan set in, and which caused the adoption of a nation-wide rationing system for the town population, has now entered upon a stage of markedly greater stringency.

And, in a letter in the correspondence columns, on the same day there appeared the following :

In March of this year I was a member of a relief commission in the famine districts of Carpathia, that strange province inhabited by Russian peasants which forms a wedge between the frontiers of Poland, Rumania, and Hungary, and which belongs, no one exactly knows why, to Czechoslovakia.... The men,.... during their military service, had actually eaten meat. Since, however, their return to their villages, many had seen ... meat ...[no] more.

From 1917 to 1938 the British public have been told of famines in Russia. But how many headlines have told them that the Russian peasants in Czechoslovakia have lived under famine conditions at any time since the creation of Czechoslovakia as an independent state? It is in comparison with the past condition of Russia, the conditions in India, China and Japan to-day; and even with such European countries as Poland and Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Rumania, that we must approach the food problem in the U.S.S.R. Not by comparing with Britain, where people take for granted their tea from India and China where famine rages unreported in our Press; or coffee and bananas from Brazil, where appalling poverty constantly prevails.

It was with such reflections as these, and knowledge of such facts, that I returned to the U.S.S.R. in the middle of 1933, and remained there, with only one holiday abroad, till the middle of 1936.

## CHAPTER XI

### RETURN TO THE U.S.S.R.

**I**N June 1933 after just six months in England I returned to Moscow at the invitation of Hermann Habicht of the American 'Open Road' tourist agency. Though by this time practically every foreign business office had been closed, the Open Road was allowed to continue its work as it was not a profit-making concern, and was recognized as performing very useful work in giving assistance to tourists. For whereas the ordinary tourist arrives in Moscow and then proceeds to make appointments and fix up interviews and visits, it was our job to arrange in advance all the requirements of our tourists so that they usually saved several days of preparatory telephoning and the fixing of appointments. But tourists who are promised "personal service" can be very exacting; and I must say that my sympathy and admiration for the Intourist guides was greatly enhanced after personally working with the type of person with whom they had to deal.

A certain American gentleman had purchased at the Soviet bookshop in New York a copy of an English-Russian dictionary. Owing to faulty binding about twenty pages were missing. I was asked to see what could be done about it. Within three hours I was able to place in his hands a new copy, having exchanged his incomplete copy at the State publishing house. This was one of my most rapid acts of "personal service"!

Among the groups of tourists organized by the Open Road a hardy annual is the Sherwood Eddy group, which consists of deans of colleges, liberal senators, and a various assortment of progressive business men, teachers, and parsons. When the Eddy group arrived in Moscow they

were put in the New Moscow Hotel, in spite of the fact that Sherwood Eddy had specially asked for the Savoy. At the moment the Savoy Hotel was full. Later on, however, after a few days in the New Moscow, we were told that the whole group could be transferred if they wished to the more 'aristocratic' Savoy. They did wish, and I was responsible for the removal. When everything had been accomplished, and at last I had shepherded them all to their rooms and went to the dining-room for some refreshment, a lady who was a member of the party drew me aside and said: "Mr. Sloan, I have a room with a bathroom, but no toilet. I absolutely must have a toilet. Please arrange this." So back I went to the hall-porter, explained what was required, and the lady received her room, her bath, *and* her toilet. Such was my experience of providing "personal service" for the tourist in Moscow.

I do not know whether people's observation develops to an abnormal extent when they visit the U.S.S.R., or whether they ask questions just for the sake of asking, but I would not be an Intourist guide for anything. Only last summer when leading a group of tourists I was asked the following question: "Mr. Sloan, I saw a militiaman take a little book like a notebook from his pocket to-day. Can you tell me what would be in that book?" And on another occasion, visiting an old palace that was now a museum, and having already had the most exhaustive explanations by the guide, one of the tourists asked: "And can you tell me, please, what kind of wood the floor is made of?"

I remember reading not so long ago a letter to an English newspaper from a lady who had been to Russia. She complained bitterly that she was not free to go where she liked. As an example she described how, when visiting a museum, she had got tired and wanted to go home. But she was not allowed to go alone. She was forced to sit in the vestibule for half an hour, waiting for the others to finish their tour of the museum as the guide was apparently so afraid that she might see something

that she shouldn't see! And, in his articles on his experiences as a trade union delegate, the French miners' official, Kleber L  gay, gave as an example of his lack of freedom in Moscow the fact that, on the occasion of the great May Day demonstration, they had to walk twenty minutes to get into the Red Square, which was actually just five minutes from the hotel. As one who has worked with tourists, my sympathy lies entirely with the guide who would not let an English lady, with no knowledge of Russian, start out alone to try to find her way back to her hotel. If the lady had got lost it was the guide and not she who would have afterwards had to shoulder the blame. And as for Legay's complaint that he was not allowed to enter the Red Square from the wrong end when a military parade and demonstration were to pass through it, I can tell him how I had to walk miles out of my way on Coronation Day in London, not because over a million people were demonstrating, but because quite a short royal procession was to pass along many of the main streets of the city.

Before my work with the Open Road was concluded I was asked to stay on in Moscow at a permanent job. I accepted, and was there for the following three years. These years were eventful ones, for at the same time as Fascism came to power in Germany, the Soviet Union began to progress in its internal affairs at a rate hitherto unknown. I had not been back long before it became clear that the harvest had been a record one. In fact, the main problem of that autumn was not the gathering of the harvest so much as the storing and the transporting of the grain. Granaries were filled to overflowing, collective farming had proved itself, but the storage and transport facilities had now become the weakest link. However, supplies of grain were now adequate to meet the needs of the population without any longer a feeling of shortage, and in the three years that followed I saw the successive abolition of rationing on bread, other products, and the final abolition in February 1936 of Torgsin. From that

time on there were fixed prices for all goods, and possessors of foreign currency no longer enjoyed the privilege of buying cheap. So angry were certain embassies when the Torgsin stores were closed that they demonstrated their disapproval by importing their supplies from abroad. This was in spite of the fact that they had never by any means purchased everything at Torgsin, preferring to sell their foreign currency by indirect channels to Soviet citizens who then bought in Torgsin, and making an illegal profit by purchasing goods in the Soviet shops.

When I returned to Moscow in June 1933 the city was looking at its best. Every spring the Green Trust (which is the trust in charge of parks and gardens) lays out every available space as a playground for the children or as a garden, and new buildings which grow only slowly during the winter suddenly shoot up to unexpected heights. In the winter, by the way, in spite of the severe frosts, building continues. The construction job is encased in wooden coverings, and work goes on inside, which is artificially heated. This 'indoor' building technique is now widely developed in order to put an end to seasonal work in the building industry. But arriving back in June 1933 I was not only struck by the number of buildings that had been completed since I left, but also by the number of those that remained at the same stage as when I had last seen them. Shortage of building workers and building materials was responsible for this delay, and it will still be some time before either materials or workers are available in the numbers required.

It was during these three years that we built the first line of our Moscow Metro, or Underground. I say 'we' built, because all Moscow was conscious of the importance of 'our' first Metro, and a great number of Moscow inhabitants, including myself, personally participated in the work of building. I have already mentioned a *subbotnik* on the Gigant State farm, and the Moscow Metro was the scene of thousands of *subbotniks*, when workers from office and factories did a day's voluntary labour under-

ground on their free day, carting clay, shovelling earth, and doing other jobs of this kind.

It is pleasant to have done a *subbotnik* on construction work, even if only for one day, for you then feel a personal interest in the finished job. And when the Moscow Under-ground was finally opened, thousands of citizens knew that they themselves had helped to build it, and this made it all the more their very own. When people called the Moscow Metro the "best in the world" I was sceptical at first. Only when I again saw the London one and made comparisons, did I see that the description was entirely justified. The Moscow Metro, with its columns of marble, beautiful lighting and fawn-coloured coaches is certainly beautiful. Some may think that the use of marble on an underground railway is extravagant. And yet, what place in Moscow is more universally used? And by the time the other lines of the Metro are built the whole surface of Moscow will also have changed.

It must always be remembered that in the U.S.S.R. no job is completed without having contributed something to the general development of technique. Many workers on the Metro construction were absolutely unskilled when they first started working there. I personally know a coal-miner from Australia who not only trained Soviet workers in the art of tunnelling, but himself obtained a free course in stone-masonry when it came to decorating the new stations with marble columns and tiled walls. Every one of those workers who learnt a craft on the Metro construction carries that knowledge with him into other jobs, thus raising the level of technique in other places.

When I first went to Moscow in 1931 the shops were conspicuous for everything but stocks of goods. Busts of Lenin, red bunting and wooden cheeses were displayed where, under other conditions, one would have expected to find goods for sale. I remember on one occasion a woman friend telling me that she had been delighted to see cauliflowers in a shop-window—this was in 1932,

a very bad year for vegetables. On going into the shop to inquire the price she was told, "they're not for sale, they're only for show." But from the end of 1932, when Soviet leaders stated that more attention would now be paid to consumers' goods, the supplies steadily began to increase.

A sensational event was the reopening of Moscow's largest department store stocked entirely with Soviet products. The store now compared quite favourably with a department store in England, and all its wares were of Soviet manufacture. Remember that prior to 1928 the Soviet Union had no mass production of consumers' goods at all. With this in mind the achievement of five or six years was thrilling to all of us who had lived there through the whole or part of that period.

And with the opening of this shop, and the successive opening of new shops throughout the city it was made clear that there was no truth whatever in the legend that Socialism leads to standardization. While there was general shortage there was also a lack of variety. But no sooner did the level of production rise than a greater variety of goods began to appear on the market till, by 1936, a single bread shop in Moscow boasted over a hundred varieties of bread. True, in the U.S.S.R. there is not, and never will be, that variety whose only cause is the number of competing firms each producing what is, in fact, the same product. But the fact that human tastes do, and should, differ has always been recognized in the U.S.S.R. The Soviet leaders have always made it clear that they consider that efficient socialism should produce a great variety of products, so as to allow the citizen the very widest choice in planning his personal consumption.

The abolition of rationing was carried out by degrees from 1933 onwards. New 'commercial shops' were opened by the State, selling goods at high prices. Then, as the rationing of each product came to an end, the price of such goods in the commercial shops was lowered by Government decree. When bread-rationing was abolished

the new price for bread was fixed at half-way between what had been the rationed and what had been the unrationed price. In order to compensate people for the rise in the price of their minimum consumption of bread a universal increase of wages was decreed at the same time to cover the rise in the price of bread as compared with the rationed prices.

Can you imagine a situation in which, overnight, the prices of a number of different goods in all shops are reduced by anything from 10 to 25 per cent? Can you imagine this happening and not a single person in the shopkeeping business being in any way upset by such an occurrence? Because this is what has happened on several occasions since 1933 in the U.S.S.R. It pleases the housewives and other consumers, and the people who run the shops have an increase in their turnover. As the shops are all State concerns the whole financial loss is borne by the State itself which issues the decree lowering prices. Having seen such a thing happen on several occasions I can see nothing to prevent it happening again and again as the level of production is raised. This means that the U.S.S.R. alone of all countries has solved the problem of steadily raising wages and lowering prices at the same time as production is increased, thus ensuring to the people a permanently rising standard of life. It seems inevitable that, as a result of this process a time must be reached in the long run when wages are so high and prices so low that money no longer limits the consumption of any citizen or group of citizens. That state of society will conform to Marx's own forecast of Communism, when each will receive according to his needs because there will be enough of everything for all.

In the summer of 1935 I spent my holiday in a peasant's cottage near Moscow. It is sometimes thought that Soviet workers spend all their holidays in rest-homes or on organized tours, and in an earlier chapter I have already mentioned that this is not so, and that as a matter of fact only about 10 per cent of the people are catered

for in this way at the present time. I personally felt, in the summer of 1935, that I wanted to spend my holiday away from people, and while I could have obtained a pass for a rest-home I preferred to go into the country not far from Moscow.

The cottage where I stayed was surrounded by forest. There were three villages each within two miles, and a railway station about three miles away. There was only one road from the station leading to one of the villages—the other ‘roads’ were simply rough tracks of earth and stone, navigable for carts or tractors, but certainly not suitable for automobile traffic. At one time this area had been completely overgrown with forest, but each village had gradually carved out for itself a large clearing for cultivation, and these clearings to-day were worked by the collective farms.

In the family with which I stayed there were four people. The mother, a Polish woman of about fifty, spent the whole of her time on the family’s own little bit of land looking after the cow and selling milk in the town. There were two sons, aged about 23 and 27 respectively, and a daughter of 18. The eldest son was a worker on a neighbouring State farm which specialized in fruit and vegetable growing. The second son was working for the time being on the family land; he had worked in a factory and had applied for admission to the air force on reaching military age, to which he expected to be called at any moment. The daughter was at home while I was there, but during term-time she was a student in a technical college somewhere between our village and Moscow, and received a State stipend while studying. The cottage consisted of two tiny rooms, in one of which the women slept and in the other the men. I camped out in a barn.

The land round Moscow has never been particularly good for farming. And the collective farms in this area are by no means model ones. But during that summer of 1935 the farms did not look badly cared for, and a good

harvest was anticipated. It was interesting to note in this quite small area where there were three separate farms what a difference there was between them. I often discussed with the peasants the causes of difference in efficiency, and they invariably boiled down to the question of personnel. In the largest of these villages, for example, where the collective had the greatest acreage, the fields were the least well kept. Why? Well, in that village there happened to be an 'artel' (producing co-operative) which made wooden toys. The families in the village were divided in their allegiance to their 'industrial' co-operative and the collective farm, with the result that there was not the concentration on farming necessary to make the best of the acreage at their disposal.

Unlike the factory workers who receive wages according to the amount of work they do, the collective farmer's income is not a wage but a share of the total product of the farm, which is divided each year among the members according to the work they do. This division is made partly in goods and partly in money obtained by the collective for the sale of its products. Each peasant family has the right to use or to sell the share of the product which it receives. Before the sharing out takes place the collective must pay its taxes, pay the local State-owned 'machine and tractor stations' (M.T.S.) for use of machinery hired during the year, and set aside a certain part of its income for the next year's seed fund, fodder, etc., and the capital development of the farm itself.

The smallest of the three villages appeared to have an excellent spirit, and I was told that the collective was producing very good results. Productivity was already well ahead of what it had been under the old strip system. It was when visiting this particular village to buy eggs that I heard all the woes of an old peasant woman of about 73 years of age, a victim of rheumatism. She and her husband were members of the collective farm and had their own little vegetable garden, a cow and fowls as well. She received a pension from the State because of

her age ; and their son was in the Red Army. But work on the collective farm was not at all what it should be. "To-day," she told me, "I was in the fields for ten hours but even then I had not earned a work-day."

Now the 'work-day' on the collective farm is roughly calculated on the basis of what an ordinary healthy unskilled person can do in eight hours. The norm of work is calculated in every collective farm according to local conditions, workers being credited with more work-days for more skilled work and more work-days if they complete more than the allotted norm during the day. The grievance of this old woman was that, as an old-age pensioner of 73 and intensely rheumatic, she could not accomplish the norm for eight hours in a period of ten hours work in the fields. For her this was unfortunate but it actually showed that the norm was probably a very reasonable one, for a healthy man or woman of normal working age would certainly have been credited with at least one work-day for eight hours of such work.

As everywhere else in the world very much in the Soviet Union depends on personnel. When we talk of 'socialism' we are far too inclined to think of a State machine which does everything with a dull uniformity. But in practice the State machine depends on the human beings that run it, and, therefore, such a uniformity, even if it were desirable, is impossible ; and fortunately so, because it certainly would not be desirable. One collective farm may achieve startlingly good results in a few years, while another, just next to it, may lag behind. As a rule if we eliminate such factors as the presence of competing interests, such as small industrial concerns in the village, these differences are directly traceable to the leadership that the collective farmers have elected to their administration.

Where a chairman of a collective farm is energetic and inspires confidence nothing can prevent the work of the collective progressing. At one farm I visited, in the vicinity of Moscow the chairman had been in office for seven years, and the farm was steadily increasing its

output. I was proudly shown the 'wall-newspaper,' regularly issued by the management, and found a threat to certain members that if they did not stop slacking in their work they might be expelled from the collective. "Have they been expelled?" I asked (the newspaper was some weeks old). "No, of course, not," was the laughing reply of a group of peasants. "Why? Are they working better?" "Of course, they are," was the answer. In this case the chairman was obviously an able fellow, the spirit of the collective was good, and it was not a difficult thing to discipline recalcitrant members who were not taking their work seriously enough.

But in another collective that I visited there was not the same spirit of co-operation. This was quite close to where I was staying, and I myself was struck by the personality of a certain individual who lived in a two-storied wooden house in the forest, much larger than the ordinary peasant's cottage, and some distance from the village. He happened to be a member of the collective farm that was not doing so well, and one evening I was invited to supper where I found that the chairman of the local soviet and the chairman of the collective farm were also guests. Our host displayed an intense interest in England and in my own attitude to the U.S.S.R., and did not strike me as being himself particularly friendly to his own government. When we came to discussing the collective farm he told me, "between ourselves," that he had joined it to avoid taxation but he "didn't intend to do any work!"

Later on, discussing with one of the villagers, I learnt something of this individual's history. He had been an officer in the tsarist army, and had bought this house of his just after the Revolution when he settled on the land more or less as a 'landlord-gone-peasant.' He was not considered to be particularly friendly to the Soviets, but he was the kind of person who always seemed to manage to keep within the law and to keep on good terms with the members of the local Soviet, and, since collectivization,

with the local collective farm administration. By occasionally entertaining them he apparently hoped to be a purely nominal collective farmer, thus avoiding taxation, which is heavier on individual than it is on collective farmers, and before I left I heard that he had made some sort of contract by which he would be responsible for supplying the use of a horse and cart to the collective, which would count as his contribution.

Now this was in the year 1935. When we read of arrests of anti-Soviet elements in the U.S.S.R. we are, at this great distance away, often inclined to think that this is on some fictitious charge, because we assume far too easily that the survivals of the old ruling class are now extinct. Actually, as far as this individual is concerned, I have not the slightest doubt of his hostility to the Soviet system. But if this hostility is not active he remains at liberty. I am further convinced that his regular entertaining of the chairman of the local soviet and of the collective farm could quite reasonably be defined as bribery. If he had to serve a prison sentence for petty bribery to officials I should not be surprised—or sorry. Further, if at a certain stage those local soviet and collective farm officials that so readily accepted his hospitality were removed from their jobs, and were even prosecuted for acceptance of bribes, I should also not be surprised. Yet who was going to take the initiative in starting a train of prosecutions? In talking with a young peasant who had told me all about this affair, I asked: “Why don’t you report what is going on?” His reply was: “I’ve no proof. If only something serious would happen, I’d report it at once.” And so it went on. And so it must go on till either this individual becomes a more satisfactory collective farmer and fits better into the community, or, gaining confidence in his own methods, he extends his intrigues until something sufficiently serious happens to cause it to be reported. When local peasants demand an investigation there will probably be a general clean-up in which four or five people at least may be arrested, tried, and

sentenced for that petty corruption that has extended over a considerable number of years.

When I describe in some detail this particular case of which I knew in a certain village the lesson to be drawn is a general one. When we read of 'sabotage' in the U.S.S.R. we may often wonder how, if such things are possible, they can go on for so long unnoticed. The answer is that if a person has hostile tendencies but conceals them, always working just within limits that can be interpreted as "personal weakness," "eccentricity," "inability to work collectively with others," then that person may for years in a Soviet community pass as an adequate citizen, always gaining the benefit of the doubt. And when, in a country like the U.S.S.R., a vast social and economic upheaval has taken place, when uneducated peasants are rapidly learning to administer their own vast large-scale farms, when peasant youths are mastering in a few months the latest machinery, then any deliberately inefficient person in a responsible position can use every weakness, every lack of skill, for purposeful wrecking, while all the time placing the blame on the inefficiency of subordinates or the lack of skilled workers available to do the job. It is only when the cumulative results of the activity of a particular person or group are at some stage seen to converge and it is seen that there was a method behind the series, that someone suspects; the alarm is sounded, an investigation follows, witnesses are called from all along the line of events, and an enemy is exposed. These considerations are particularly relevant to the period since my return to the U.S.S.R. in 1933, for it is precisely in this period that there has taken place an all-Union round-up of enemies as a result of certain events that threw light on what was going on. Have my ex-officer in that Soviet village and the friends he entertained been arrested, or are they still at liberty? I do not know. If they are still at liberty, this is simply because in that particular area those individuals have not yet aroused sufficient suspicion to cause their neighbours to demand an investigation into their

activities, and, as all over the U.S.S.R., they enjoy for the time being the benefit of the doubt.

I happened on this holiday to be almost next-door to a pioneer camp, organized by one of Moscow's factories for the children of its workers. At this camp there were about seventy children at a time, and two or three groups of seventy each stayed at camp for a fortnight during the summer. The children were in more or less equal numbers of girls and boys, who spent the daytime together but slept in separate buildings.

The staff of the camp consisted of kitchen and domestic workers, one or two teachers from the school which catered for most of the children of the workers in the factory that ran the camp, and several Young Communists from the factory who, in their spare time, worked with the pioneer organization in the school. These young people were responsible for organizing the activities of the camp and giving leadership to the children. In addition there were a doctor and nurse, responsible for the health of the children during their period in camp.

My first acquaintance with the children was when they came down to the stream for a bath the day after their arrival. After that I was frequently a guest at the camp and saw something of its programme from morning till nightfall. If one is to draw a comparison between such holiday camps in the U.S.S.R. and those which exist in this country for working-class children, the first difference lies in the universality of the system of camps in the U.S.S.R. to-day. There is no large factory in the U.S.S.R. which has not a camp for the children of its workers, and no small concern which does not share a camp with some other factory. Children's camps are a part of the general structure of the U.S.S.R. And secondly, I should say that whereas organized games are the centre of activity of camps in this country, in the U.S.S.R. organized games play a part, but are far from predominating in the activities of the Soviet children. In the pioneer camps which I have visited the artistic and intellectual development of

the children has always been stressed quite as much as their physical development. The publication of camp newspapers, literary and dramatic circles, groups of young naturalists and young artists—all these things receive as much attention as swimming, physical culture, and games. While most activities are carried on in groups, the opportunity for each individual child to develop any particular personal interest is very great indeed, and while I have visited pioneer camps on a number of occasions I have never seen a child look bored or uninterested in what was going on.

Particularly important in the training of Soviet children is the active participation of the Young Communists, those who have themselves just graduated from school and are still sufficiently close to childhood to understand the interests of the youngsters and to be able to lead their activities in a way which appeals to them. In every Soviet school there is a *Komsorg* (Komsomol Organizer—i.e., Young Communist Organizer), usually sent by a neighbouring factory, whose work it is to organize the children's leisure time activities. At the pioneer camps the same Komsorgs are present, usually one young man and one young woman in each camp, who are responsible for leading the camp social activities and the various group activities of the children. In this way in the U.S.S.R. the young children look to those of from 18 to 25 for friendly leadership in their out-of-school activities; instead of, as is usual here, there being an almost insurmountable gap between school children on the one hand and the young people who have just started working for a living on the other.

While back in the U.S.S.R. from June 1933 to June 1936 I had considerable personal experience of Soviet trade unionism. For some time I was editor of a 'wall-newspaper' and also a trade union organizer. During this period I also had a quite intimate experience of the working of the Soviet social insurance system. As trade union organizer I saw how it applied to my fellow-workers,

and as one who had to go to hospital for four weeks I saw how it applied to myself. This visit to hospital was, incidentally, a direct result of my holiday in the country which I have just been describing. On one or two occasions—unwisely I know—I drank from streams when out walking in the forest. I later discovered that many of these streams passed through villages, and a few days after returning to Moscow I started to run a temperature and found that I had contracted typhoid. I obtained, in this way first-hand information of the Soviet treatment of the sick, and of the operation of the social insurance system.

## CHAPTER XII

### ON BEING ILL AND TRADE UNION ORGANIZER

**I**F you are a Soviet worker and feel unwell you can always visit the clinic in your locality, and sometimes there is one attached to your place of work. If you have a temperature or cannot walk then you have the right to call a visiting doctor to come to your home. So long, however, as you have no temperature and are capable of walking it is required that you should first visit a doctor at a clinic before having one sent to you at home free of charge. If hospital treatment is considered necessary the clinic makes the necessary arrangements and when discharged you again come under the supervision of the clinic for convalescence. There is no system of private 'family doctor' in the U.S.S.R., but people are definitely encouraged to attend one clinic regularly, where, whatever their ailment, their medical history is filed and is available to the doctor or doctors treating them.

When I returned from my holiday in 1935 I already felt unwell. Instead of being full of energy I felt weak and unenterprising. I began to have headaches, and my stomach behaved abnormally. Then I had a slight temperature. On my first visit to the clinic I was advised to have a blood-test taken, as malaria was suspected. Then I had a test for typhoid and was told to stay in bed to await the result. The next stage was to be told that I must go to hospital for further observation, as typhoid was strongly suspected, though not absolutely certain.

• On entering the fever hospital every patient had a bath and a close hair-cut—most distressing to the women patients. I was placed in a room of my own for three

days while my temperature was at its highest. The fact that I had typhoid was confirmed. I was then moved into a large ward with some twelve beds. Friends were allowed to bring books and fruit and any other food that was permitted by the doctors, but there certainly was no need to have anything brought in from outside.

The general atmosphere of the hospital was one of great informality and friendliness. On the one hand there was certainly not that starchy cleanliness which one finds in hospitals in this country, but there appeared to be a general efficiency and adequate care of patients that was all that could be desired. The nurses, as far as I could judge, were considerably less skilled than the hospital nurses here, but there were more sisters and doctors to a given number of patients, with the result that the nurses' personal responsibility was less.

One of the nurses happened to be a Baptist, and started proselytizing me from the moment that she heard that I was a foreigner. She was particularly interested to know what extent the Baptists flourished in Britain, and gave long lectures on religion to myself and her fellow-nurses and anyone that would listen to her. None of the Russians bothered to argue with her, though many of the nurses were unenthusiastic supporters of the Russian Orthodox Church, in which they had been brought up.

It was interesting to note that the Baptist nurse in her missionary work was just as hard on the Russian Orthodox Church as any Bolshevik ever was. "Oh, well, that's not real religion, that's false religion," was her answer to any remark which referred to the Orthodox Church. As far as I could make out there was nothing in Soviet legislation that irritated her except that she would have liked the Baptists to have the same monopoly of the people's minds as the Russian Orthodox Church had enjoyed before the Revolution.

The nurses' hours worked out at an average of eight per day on a shift roughly (as far as I can recollect) as follows: First day, 7 A.M. to 7 P.M.; second day, 7 P.M.

to third day, 7 A.M.; fourth day, 7 A.M. to 7 P.M.; fifth day, 7 P.M. to sixth day, 7 A.M. In this way there were twenty-four hours free to every twelve hours of work, night shifts and day shifts alternately, so that night work came once every three days. I asked the nurses how this arrangement suited them, and they all appeared to find it very satisfactory. There is no compulsion on a nurse to live in when working in a Soviet hospital, so that their hours of personal liberty were very considerable compared with our own. Also, there was no need for nurses to be unmarried, and, in fact all the nurses whom I met were married, and some of them had families.

Restrictions on patients were at a minimum. When convalescent there was complete freedom to walk about. The only fault I had to find in this respect was that, no doubt because of the oldness of the building, there was no reading-room or other place where we could comfortably spend our time outside the ward itself.

From the moment that I was taken to hospital visitors called on me from my place of work. Not only was this a private act of friendship but the trade union organizer is expected, as part of his or her duties, to see that any member who is ill is properly cared for. I, therefore, received notes asking if there was anything I needed, and I had only to ask for it to get it.

I was in the hospital for four weeks. I was then released with instructions to keep away from work for another two weeks. What happened to my wages during this period? In the U.S.S.R. when a worker is ill, he receives his pay from the social insurance fund administered by the trade unions.<sup>1</sup> But in order to get this money it is necessary to present a doctor's certificate (known as a 'sickness bulletin') stating the period during which he is off work. On a visit to a clinic, or when the doctor visits you at home, prohibition of work is accompanied by the giving of such a bulletin, stating the date on which

<sup>1</sup>See note, p. 149

you stopped work, the name of the illness, and the number of days until the doctor will next see you. On each successive visit the bulletin is signed up to date, and on returning to work the bulletin must be accompanied with the stamp of the clinic and a statement that you may return to work.

From the moment that I was told not to work I had a bulletin in my possession. This was initialled each time a doctor saw me and also by the hospital. When I came out I had to visit the clinic before I was allowed to return to work. Altogether I was off work for six weeks, and on presenting my bulletin I received 75 per cent of my pay for the first week, plus full pay for the remaining five. As I had been fed in hospital and treated free of charge, I actually made money by going to hospital! I had almost six weeks' wages to spend on a period of convalescence of two weeks. Such treatment, let me repeat, was in no way exceptional, but is typical treatment of all Soviet workers who are taken ill.

I have mentioned that the trade union organizer is responsible for seeing to the welfare of workers who are ill. Suppose, for example, that I had not gone to hospital but had been off work and told to stay at home. My insurance money would not have been due till I presented my bulletin on returning to work. In the meantime I would have needed money. It is the job of the trade union to make the necessary advances to workers in such conditions and otherwise to see to their welfare. In order that this job may be efficiently carried out a social insurance delegate is elected in every organization by the union members for this purpose.

It was not long after I returned to work that our trade union organizer retired from office. The party group nominated me as her successor, and I was elected unanimously at a general meeting of all members in our group. The work of trade union organizer consists, in a Soviet enterprise, in directing the work of the trade union group or branch. (In the U.S.S.R. all workers in the same

organization are in the same union, so that there is a separate group or branch in every place of work, and usually for every department in each enterprise). My day-to-day tasks consisted in taking up the case of any worker who needed assistance: who was dissatisfied with his or her housing conditions and needed new accommodation, who could not find a suitable crèche or kindergarten or a child, who wanted to take special evening classes or attend an evening school of some kind, who had complaints against anyone on the administration, who was dissatisfied with working conditions or the quality of materials supplied, and, in fact, to take steps to set right every wrong of which my fellow-workers complained.

But this was not all. For it was my job in addition to see that the annual collective agreement was properly fulfilled both by the workers and by the administration, that the labour laws were operated properly, that the necessary conditions were provided for the health and safety of my colleagues, and that social insurance benefits were properly paid. Then there were educational classes to be organized and the holding of regular production meetings, at which we discussed our work, our weaknesses, and the weaknesses of others. Whenever some national campaign was taking place, such as the elections to the Soviets, it was I as trade union organizer who arranged meetings at our place of work; and when a courier was charged with theft it was I who arranged the legal defence for her free of charge. In this way it will be seen that the responsibility of the trade union organizer in the U.S.S.R. is that of a sort of 'universal aunt' or uncle to all one's fellow-workers—to negotiate with the administration and to organize discussions of the work in the enterprise, whatever it is, and for general political purposes. In addition I had to help the administration to arrange our annual holidays so that everyone should be as satisfied as possible, to procure passes for rest-homes for those who wanted them, and to investigate any cases of workers losing their jobs if they considered that they had been discharged

unjustifiably. At the same time in general meetings it was also part of my work to bring to the attention of my fellow-workers any case of lax discipline among ourselves, or cases where individual slackness caused poor work on the part of the collective. Finally, there was the editing of the 'wall-newspaper,' in which every worker and the representatives of the administration had an opportunity to voice their opinions on the affairs of our organization or affairs in general.

The list of functions of a trade union organizer here enumerated appear to be very extensive. How was it possible for anyone within a reasonable number of hours to carry on this work? The reader must not think that I was personally occupied in carrying out all the responsibilities outlined. As organizer it was one of my functions to see that they were all performed adequately, but this meant that I had to mobilize other members of the union to help to do the work. In fact the Soviet trade union is the organization which cares for the interests of the individual worker and of production in the interest of all the workers as a whole. The organizer has to see that all the various functions are adequately carried out, and all the workers in any enterprise are expected to assist by sharing out the various functions.

Of course, every issue did not arise every day. Only once, for example, did I have a case of a fellow-worker being in exceptionally urgent need of new housing accommodation. This was when she divorced her husband, and I was able to ensure that she was the first to obtain a room of her own when the administration became possessed of some new flats. Again it was not every day that a colleague would want accommodation for a child in crèche or kindergarten; and when someone wanted some special form of evening classes, once it had been arranged, there was no more to do in the matter, for the time being at any rate. And so, with most requests for help, or complaints, the matter was usually settled for the individual case concerned and we heard no more about it.

Every year a new collective agreement had to be signed with the administration. This meant that the rates of pay of every worker had to be overhauled, and taking into account the general scales worked out by the higher committees in the union, it was our job to apply and adjust them to our own particular conditions. No collective agreement was drawn up without a general discussion of the old and new rates of wages by all the workers, so that there was never a single individual who did not know why he earned what he did, and how more could be earned if he desired. But the collective agreement did not only fix the wage-rates for the coming year. The discussion on the new agreement invariably surveyed the whole economic and social life of the organization during the year, and the 'wall-newspaper' was a forum in which such matters were fully explored: To what extent had the administration fulfilled its obligations to provide adequate comfort for the staff?—Had the buffet and dining-room been run as agreed at the beginning of the year?—Were the children of workers receiving adequate crèche and kindergarten accommodation?—Was the administration paying enough attention to the matter of safety devices and ventilation? All these matters were discussed in detail by all who wished to contribute to the 'wall-newspaper.' And on the basis of such discussion the new collective agreement would be drawn up and signed.

The trade union committee in every organization had considerable funds at its disposal. The membership dues were fixed at one per cent of earnings for all workers but in addition the employing organization had to make certain contributions to the union trade funds, and the whole of the State contributions to social insurance passed through the hands of the trade unions. Every year we had a discussion on the trade union committee of our budget for the coming year. Not only had we to allot sufficient sums for insurance benefits but in addition considerable sums were spent on education, sport, entertainments,

allowances to workers with large families (in the way of free crèches or kindergartens for their children), the provision of childrens' playgrounds, the purchase of passes to rest-homes and sanatoria; and so on. While the total sum available was fixed on the basis of the members' contributions together with the additional contribution paid by the administration, the spending of this money was entirely in the hands of our own committee, whose job it was to allot it so as to provide the greatest possible benefits for our fellow-workers.

When a worker asked for a pass to a rest-home or for new housing accommodation it was our job always to take into account the particular merits of the case. If a worker required a new flat it was our job to know the size of that worker's family and the worker's record at his job. Both these things would be taken into account in allotting accommodation. In being allotted accommodation in a new block of flats a good and efficient worker would certainly receive preference over an inefficient worker of the same family position, but a worker with children would get preference over a more efficient or responsible one without children. A woman worker with children invariably received preference over others who did not share that responsibility. So that, while on the one hand, as far as wages were concerned, each was paid "according to his work," when it came to social services of every kind the question of need was always given serious consideration.

It may be asked in what way the trade union was able, anyway, to put housing accommodation at the disposal of particular workers. It is, therefore, necessary to mention here that most Soviet organizations, owing to the acute shortage of housing, take every opportunity of building or acquiring accommodation for the use of their employees, and whenever any such accommodation is acquired it is for the trade union to press for the distribution of it according to the needs of its members.

I do not wish it to be thought that in the U.S.S.R.

people are superhuman. Actually, they are very human. Therefore, it would be wrong to expect that every trade union organizer or committee always did just what was best for the members and never erred a little in its own favour against the interests of the rank-and-file. There are, however, more opportunities for the rank-and-file to express their disapproval than elsewhere, and they do so. I well remember an occasion when at the Technicum of Foreign Languages the trade union committee, having obtained two passes to a rest-home, presented them to one of its members, who was on the administration of the organization, for himself and his wife.

At the meeting at which this decision was announced there was a highly explosive discussion. The committee maintained that a notice had been up for three weeks inviting applications for these passes; and that only this one individual had applied, asking for the second pass for his wife. As there were no other applications his request had been granted. On the other hand one teacher after another stood up and said that the notice had been placed where nobody could see it, that in fact nobody had seen it, and that the allotment of two passes to one member of the administration was outrageous. It was. And the personnel of that committee was not re-elected when its term of office came to an end.

Though I tell this story I do not want it to be thought typical, but I do want it to be realized that elected committees in the U.S.S.R. suffer the faults of elected committees everywhere, and it is only steady watch by the rank-and-file that keeps them working in the right direction. The question in the U.S.S.R. to-day is not trade union control or control by employers. To-day it is the question of good trade union control or bad trade union control. And you have only to read the Soviet trade union newspaper *Trud* [Labour] to realize that there is bad work as well as good. But in the U.S.S.R. such bad work is exposed with the maximum of publicity, and in this the U.S.S.R. is different from other countries.

Constant exposure of bureaucracy and inefficiency is bound to lead to the gradual annihilation of these faults—which is the great hope of the U.S.S.R. as compared with the rest of the world.

I happened to be the editor of our 'wall-newspaper' during an election to the Moscow Soviet. A special issue of the newspaper dealt exclusively with our instructions to our candidate. Every aspect of municipal administration was covered in our instructions. For example, I personally raised the question of the behaviour of the militia. They had developed a habit, since Moscow set up its network of official inquiry bureaux (which now cover the city and which answer any question you like to ask), of refusing even to give the simplest directions, and referring one to the nearest inquiry kiosk. I, therefore, moved an instruction to the new Soviet to remedy this. Before I left Moscow the militiamen were answering questions as to how to find one's way anywhere, without referring one to the inquiry bureau.

This is just a small point, but suggestions, ranging from the demand for more and better public lavatories (this was actually in the instruction from a large number of organizations to the new Soviet), to the laying of tramlines in certain districts and the re-arranging of the tram stops, the opening of new shops in certain areas, and housing construction—all these matters were raised in long lists of instructions which everyone assisted in drawing up. These instructions then form the mandate of the elected candidate, and it is his or her job in the Soviet to see that the various instructions are carried out.

I have mentioned that while in office as trade union organizer it was my job to arrange the defence of our courier who had been accused of theft. The story deserves relating in full. It was customary for our courier to fetch the wages each fortnight from the cashier to save us having to queue up at the pay-desk. And one day, after our wages had been brought and distributed as usual, the cashier rang up to say that 500 roubles were

missing and that she was convinced that she had given them to our courier by mistake. The courier denied it, and the cashier—who was personally responsible for all money passing through her hands—decided to issue a writ. If she could prove that our courier had stolen the money then the responsibility for repayment would no longer rest on her, whereas, otherwise, she would have to find the money and repay it in monthly instalments to the organization employing her.

As trade union organizer, I had to see that the courier received all the necessary help to defend herself, as our group was convinced of her innocence.

I obtained a member of the Collegium of Defence Counsels, who went into all the details of the accusation, and on the day of the case we all trooped along to the People's Court. There were, as is customary in the People's Court, a judge and two assistant judges. (These are now elected by universal ballot.) The atmosphere of the court was one of complete informality and friendliness. The three judges sat on a dais behind a table covered with red cloth. The court-room was like any ordinary working-class meeting hall. Nobody wore uniform, and the litigants stood up and argued in front of the judges' table, often interrupting one another, sometimes interrupting the judge. I do not know how many times the British offence of contempt of court is committed in the Soviet courts daily. I have heard a prisoner, served with a short sentence for attempted robbery when drunk, carry on the following back-chat with the judge:

Judge: Disgraceful behaving like that in the middle of the night!

Accused: It wasn't the middle of the night, it was only twelve o'clock.

Judge: Yes it was the middle of the night.

First, the cashier put her case, then our defence counsel spoke, and the courier gave her own account of the day's events. The manager of our department spoke on the courier's general character and the lack of evidence,

and a representative of the employing organization spoke, claiming that while he was disinterested as between the courier and the cashier, all he required was a decision from the court that one or the other, or both, should repay the missing sum within a given period.

After everyone had said all that they wanted and nobody wished to express any further views, the courier was given the last word, and the judges retired to consider their verdict. It was that the courier was innocent, and that, within a given period, the cashier must find the sum that had been lost and repay it in instalments to the employing organization.

I should mention that while in the court on this occasion waiting for our case to come up we sat through an interesting alimony case. A very attractive young girl, carrying a baby, claimed alimony from a married man, who, with his wife, sat on the same bench in front of the judges' table. The man denied ever living with the girl, but a troop of women, living in flats close by that of the girl, bore witness that this man had frequently visited the girl in her home in the evenings, and that she had never been known to be on intimate terms with other men. "She was always a good girl until he came along," said one of the women witnesses, pointing to the man. The others nodded their agreement in chorus. And this evidence was considered adequate by the court to give the girl alimony, 25 per cent of the man's earnings, to assist in bringing up the child. Hard on the man, I felt personally, but the women from our organization staunchly upheld the verdict and were convinced that the man was the father of the child. Which all goes to show that, while there is not anything like the same legal rigidity about the Soviet marriage law as there is in Britain, it does not pay for a man to become too intimate with a woman in the U.S.S.R.—at any rate before witnesses—if he is not ready to shoulder the possible responsibility for the upbringing of a child!

A considerable part of my trade union work, apart

from the direct care of the welfare of our members, lay in the developing of productive efficiency within our organization. When the Stakhanov movement developed in the Soviet coal mines we in a Soviet office also considered ways and means by which we, emulating Stakhanov, could introduce improvements in our work. Almost every month we held production meetings to consider the way in which we were carrying on our work, and in these meetings there was often very plain speaking. In the U.S.S.R. people speak outright at meetings and say just what they think, to an extent that it is rare to find in this country. While it makes discussions more heated, and may give the impression of much less consideration for other people's feelings, I am convinced, having become accustomed to it, that it induces a very much healthier atmosphere in every organization than our own system of polite restraint, in which no underling ever dare say "boo" to a person higher up in the administrative scale. While in this country resentment in factories and offices takes the form of continual underground whisperings, occasionally exploding into open refusals to work and strikes, in the U.S.S.R. there is plain speaking all along, and no worker is afraid to criticize someone in a superior position.

A great deal of confusion has been caused in this country by the fact that the Soviet trade unions are interested in increasing production. The Soviet trade unions, says Sir Walter Citrine, are State organizations, but I am sure that Mr. Neville Chamberlain would have just the opposite criticism. "The Soviet State," he would say, "is far too much subject to the dictates of the trade unions for my liking!" It must always be realized that the Soviet State has been built up and defended by the trade union movement ever since 1917, and just as in Spain\* to-day the unions are doing their utmost to increase

\*NOTE TO 1943<sup>rd</sup> EDITION

The idea of the Trade Unions actively taking part in increasing production has become widespread in the territory of the United Nations, especially since the Alliance with the U.S.S.R.

production, so, too, in the U.S.S.R. As soon as the workers began to feel that they were producing in their own interests and not for the profit of others their whole attitude to their work altered accordingly.

I shall never forget the account given me by Miss Saunders in Moscow (an Englishwoman who had worked for a British firm in Russia before 1917), of her own reactions after the Revolution. When the Soviet Government passed its decree on Worker's Control the elected committee of the workers in every enterprise was given powers of control and of supervising the management in the interests of those employed. Workers' Committees were set up in every enterprise, and from that time onwards the employers tended to lose interest in production, and in many cases the workers' committees had to take over the management completely in order to keep the factories running at all. Miss Saunders, who was cashier for a British firm, told me that from the time the workers' committee was set up in her factory she preferred, on going home at night, to entrust the "key of the safe to the secretary of this committee rather than to a representative of the management. "I could never be sure," she said, "that the management would not go off with the contents of the safe, whereas the workers' committee, I knew, would see that nothing happened to damage the interests of their factory." Already that change in the sense of ownership had begun to take place which I have described already as one of the most significant results of the Russian Revolution. And it is in the light of this new sense of ownership on the part of the working people that we must approach the attitude of the Soviet trade unions to production. The factories are theirs, the standard of life in the U.S.S.R. can only to-day be raised by increasing production, as there are no longer employers at the expense of whose profits wages can be raised, and this makes every branch of every trade union interested in increasing efficiency in its own enterprise. It is in this light that we must consider the recent Stakhanov

movement for increasing the productivity of labour throughout Soviet industry.

Much has been said and written to misrepresent this movement by the workers for improved methods of work—a movement which was quite natural in a country where every worker felt that raised production meant a higher standard of life all round. Certain critics have compared this movement with a speed-up under capitalism, but such a comparison is false for a number of reasons. First, in the U.S.S.R., every worker knows that increased production not only benefits himself personally through higher earnings but the community as a whole through more products, and, therefore, leads to lower prices. In contrast, no worker under capitalism can be confident that increased output will not lead rapidly to cuts in wage-rates; further, that it will not sooner or later put him or his fellow-workers out of a job due to 'over-production.' Again, under capitalism no worker can be sure that increasing output will not foster a general crisis in which the whole working population will suffer.

Secondly, it has usually been overlooked by the critics that the Stakhanov movement is in no sense comparable to speed up because it does not demand the expenditure of more energy on the job, but rather a reorganization of the method of work so that it is performed more efficiently. Further, the initiative in such a movement came from a rank-and-file worker. Alexei Stakhanov personally reorganized the method of work of himself and a number of colleagues in such a way that output was phenomenally increased. If we examine the form of reorganization which Stakhanov introduced we find that it was simply the application of the old principle of "division of labour" resulting in increased efficiency all round. But it was a rank-and-file worker who introduced the change—because the ranks gain by increased production in the U.S.S.R.

Certain trade unionists have been rather shocked to find that in the U.S.S.R. to-day strikes are looked upon as unjustifiable attacks on the community. But when we

consider Soviet organization it becomes clear that where workers are producing for the community and not for the profit of a private employer, strikes are bound to be hostile acts to the whole of the rest of the population. So long, in the U.S.S.R., as private capitalists continued to employ labour the trade unions encouraged strikes in those enterprises to ensure that the workers received their due. But when concerns had all been taken over by the State and the trade unions given representation on the administrative authorities throughout the State economic system, strikes were no longer encouraged. In a coal-mine owned by a private company the workers at any time could improve their own position at the expense of the employer's profits. But when the coal-mine became public property any attempt of the miners in one pit to better their own conditions by strike action meant that (a) they were withholding coal from the community, and (b) were trying to force the State to give to them a greater share in the national income than could be obtained by peaceful negotiation between their own union, other unions, and the State authorities.

Obviously, under such conditions, to hold up production is to hold up the community and blackmail your fellow-workers. Soviet workers realize this. They know from their own experience that the only way to raise living standards is to increase production, and, therefore, the Soviet trade unions and their members are to-day interested in raising the productivity of labour as rapidly as possible.

I have had the opportunity to speak personally with a number of Stakhanovite workers. I was particularly interested in finding out the effect of the Stakhanov movement on employment. On one occasion I asked three Stakhanovites working in three different industries whether their increased output did not lead to unemployment for somebody. In all three cases their answer was in the negative, but each answer was a different one according to the particular conditions of the industry concerned.

When I asked a coal-miner whether the Stakhanov movement did not have the result of putting some miners out of work he replied that in his pit they had whole galleries not being worked because of the shortage of labour. The economy of labour due to Stakhanovism would enable more of these galleries to be worked. A woman lumber worker from a saw-mill said that there was so much work to be done that the Stakhanov movement would increase output and nobody would lose their job. A worker from a clothing factory told me that in her factory they had always had a reserve of work to do beyond what could be tackled by the existing staff. The Stakhanov movement was making it possible to perform some of this extra work with which the factory had hitherto been unable to cope.

Every Stakhanovite, by increasing the productivity of labour, is able to earn higher wages. But under Soviet conditions this does not mean the creation of a category of high-income workers divorced from the rest, because the Soviet trade unions make a point of seeing that every Stakhanovite worker, every innovator in production methods, shall devote part of his or her time to teaching other workers to use the same methods. It is significant that Stakhanov himself, having revolutionized production methods in his own pit, did a tour of other pits showing them how to do likewise. He was then sent to the Industrial Academy to study, and will later return to industry as the manager of a pit or to take on some other highly responsible job. In this way a rank-and-file worker, showing initiative, may become the manager of a large factory or director of a trust within five years. And in the meantime his innovations are adopted by large numbers of other workers whose incomes rise accordingly. At the same time, as a result of the increased output, the prices of goods are reduced to the consumer, so that the standard of life of everybody is raised as a result. In this way the trade unions of the U.S.S.R., in fostering every method of raising productivity,

are contributing to the general rise in the standard of life of their members which is taking place from year to year.

\*NOTE TO 1943 EDITION

The scale of sickness benefit is now varied according to length of employment and Trade Union membership. Members of six years' service on a job receive 100 % of their wages during illness. Those with a shorter period of employment receive a lower rate of benefit. This change was introduced to discourage 'flitting' from job to job.

## CHAPTER XIII

### I TRAVEL AGAIN

**I**N May 1936 I was offered an opportunity to travel for three weeks or a month in order to write up my experiences for radio broadcasts in English. I did not intend to set out on such an ambitious tour as in 1932, but planned to visit Kiev and Kharkov, present and former capitals of the Soviet Ukraine; one or two collective farm villages; and from Dniepropetrovsk to attempt to find a certain 'collective farm theatre' which I knew to be working in that district, and one of whose performers I happened to know. Again I travelled on my own, my only introduction being a paper stating that I was a 'correspondent' for the Moscow Radio Centre collecting material for broadcasts. From the Radio Centre I received a travelling allowance of seven roubles a day for bed; ten roubles, I think it was, for food, and in addition would be paid on my return for anything written as a result of my journey.

I had very much hoped to be able to see the May Day demonstrations in Kiev. However, I only went to the railway station to obtain a ticket on April 27, and already I found that people had been waiting to book seats for several days. Outside the booking office there was a queue from six in the morning. Most of the people in the queue were trying to get tickets for Kiev in order to spend the May Day holidays there with friends, a few were going there on business. Each morning about half the queue obtained tickets, each day the bookings were for one day, farther ahead, and by the time I was able to obtain a ticket it was for leaving Moscow on May 4th. My May Day, therefore, had to be spent in Moscow.

Already, in an earlier chapter, this question of Soviet travel has been discussed. Though by 1936 considerable improvements had been effected, it was still not easy to book tickets on long-distance trains without several days' notice. I decided to book for Kiev much too late to get a ticket for May Day. Other people had made the same mistake. However, once the May Day rush was over and the natives of Kiev who had been visiting Moscow had returned home, there was less of a crowd,<sup>1</sup> and I had no difficulty in obtaining my ticket for May 4th.

Coming from Moscow the old city of Kiev was particularly attractive in two respects. First, as compared with Moscow it appeared as a green city. Everywhere there seemed to be trees, much more restful on a hot day than Moscow. And secondly, Kiev was built on hills overlooking the great Dnieper river, which like the Don and Volga, really is a river and not just a glorified stream like the river at Moscow, at any rate until new waters were added to it by the Moscow-Volga canal.

The shops and people of Kiev also bore a more lively aspect than those of Moscow, a fact which impressed me about all the Ukrainian towns that I visited on that tour. Some time later, meeting someone in Moscow who had arrived at Odessa and travelled north, I was told that Moscow appeared most depressing after the southern towns. This was news, for in 1933 I had been told that the towns of the Southern Ukraine had looked particularly depressed compared with Moscow. But so rapid are the changes in the U.S.S.R. that such things cease to cause surprise. Certainly in 1936 I found more apparent gaiety and brighter shops and streets in Kiev, Kharkov, and Dniepropetrovsk than in Moscow. Moscow was growing prosperous, but the Ukraine appeared to be more prosperous still.

Yet it was in Kiev that I met the only unemployed worker that I have ever met during five years in the U.S.S.R. He was sitting in a park and so was I. Conversation began, and when I asked the inevitable question that is

always asked early in the U.S.S.R. (Intourist guides usually drop bricks by asking this question of tourists living on income from investments!) "Where do you work?" the reply, to my complete astonishment, was "I'm unemployed."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"I'm looking for work," was the answer.

"But isn't there any work here?"

"Not what I want," was the reply.

"What is your speciality?"

"I'm a chauffeur."

"Aren't there *any* jobs going here?"

"Oh, yes, plenty, but I want a job as a chauffeur."

"How did you leave your old job?"

"I just left it. It was in a small town and I found it rather dull, so I came here."

"Could you get your old job back if you went back there?"

"Yes, but I don't want to."

"Where are you living?"

"With an uncle."

"Why don't you take some other job till the one you want turns up?"

"I don't want to."

Of recent years the city of Kiev has taken the lead in work on behalf of children. Two institutions particularly attracted my attention. Their example is now being followed all over the U.S.S.R., but in both cases, I think I am right in saying, the initiator was Kiev. First, there was the Palace of the Pioneers, situated in an old private house not far from the river and just bordering on one of the city parks. In Kharkov, in the very centre of the city, in one of the old pre-revolutionary 'palaces,' there is a similar Palace of Pioneers. I saw over both. They are similar in the general principles on which they are run.

The Palace of Pioneers is an institution exclusively for children, to enable them in their spare time to pursue their hobbies with adequate equipment and instruction.

As one whose childhood's main hobby was collecting birds' eggs summer after summer I must admit that I was filled with envy at the possibilities for a member of the Young Naturalists' Group seriously to study biology and natural science, to make experiments, to breed animals and to do all the other interesting things that a child can do if equipment and instruction are available. Similarly, for the young aviators and engineers, dancers and musicians, artists and sportsmen, budding dramatists, critics and writers of drama, North Pole explorers and botanists, there was ample accommodation and equipment for all, with instructors to lead the work. A description of such an organization might, I think, give the impression that Soviet children are as serious during their leisure as at school. Let me, therefore, underline the fact that all activities at the Palace of Pioneers are purely voluntary, and there is ample space for unorganized play for the children when not spending their time at a more serious hobby.

As there is still a shortage of accommodation in these pioneer palaces—only some 10 per cent of the children at present being served by them, admission, though free of charge, is regulated by the children's conduct at school. A child must earn the right to membership of one of the groups in the Pioneer Palace by good school work, so that membership of this out-of-school club is a direct incentive to good school work. But the palaces do not only cater for the best children. The schools also send to the Pioneer Palace children who appear to have exceptional difficulty in their school studies, and the director of the Kharkov palace proudly told me that in a number of cases, by finding a real interest for a child, some of the most 'difficult' children in the town had now become exemplary school children as a result of their activity in the Palace of Pioneers. In the meantime, while accommodation is not available for all children, various smaller organizations dealing with children in their spare time, exist in every Soviet town, and deal with a variety of interests.

Among these, I may mention here the Children's Park in the Moscow Park of Culture and Rest. Happening to go here one afternoon I came across a sort of summer-house in which some twenty small children were sitting as silent as mice. They were listening to a girl of about ten years old, who, her eyes shut, was telling a story from Pushkin with the intonation of a skilled actress. There was a woman in charge, and when I asked what was done to persuade the children to perform here she simply replied: "They come and offer to recite, dance and sing. The good ones we form into an 'active' who regularly help us in our work." Memories of my own school days came back. At no stage in my education could I remember children voluntarily congregating to hear one of their number voluntarily tell stories from the classics. But in the U.S.S.R. children are taught to love literature, not, in comprehending, to learn long strips of it by heart.

The other institution in Kiev which I had some opportunity of visiting was a series of 'Pioneer Outposts' in some of the apartment houses of the city. I happened to make the acquaintance of the headmistress of a ten-year school (school catering for children from the ages of 8 to 18), and among other things she took me round to some of the pioneer outposts organized in blocks of flats from which children went to her school. In the U.S.S.R., where all schools are State schools, the children attend whatever school is nearest to their home, or, in certain cases, the school attached to the factory where their parents are employed. The purpose of the pioneer outpost is to provide, in every block of flats, playroom and outdoor playground for the children living in that building.

The outpost takes the form of a club-room and nursery indoors, and a playground and possibly a bit of garden outside. Dwellers in the house may themselves voluntarily participate in the administration of such outposts, and in addition, a local factory or the school will provide voluntary workers, drawn usually from the Young Communist League, who give so many hours a week to

organizing games for the children.

I shall for a long time remember a conversation with an old Jewish woman in one of these houses. She must have been nearly seventy years old, and voluntarily worked as 'manager' of the pioneer outpost in her block of flats, receiving financial help from the House Committee and the school, and the practical aid of a Young Communist from a neighbouring factory. As a Jewess, the new régime, of course, meant more to her than to a Russian woman of the same social standing, for in Kiev before the Revolution no Jew could ever be sure that he would not be the victim of a pogrom and other forms of persecution as in Nazi Germany to-day.

"And the children. Why, before the Revolution they had nowhere to play, except the streets! And then during the civil war things were so difficult we still couldn't afford to spend much on our children. But now look at them. A whole room in this block of flats which they can call their own—their own garden, and their own playground in the yard. There's no need now for them to play on the streets. . . . And if their parents are busy, or go out, they know that if they tell whoever's in charge of the pioneer outpost, then their children will be looked after while they are away. . . . Of course, we've just begun to have these outposts—we're the first city to organize them—but other towns are now following our example, and we want to make them universal."

From Kiev I travelled down the Don by boat on my way to Chapaevka, a collective farm that had won considerable fame during the past year or so for its enterprising activities. To get there from Kiev I had to travel by boat, by train, and, in the early hours of the morning, on foot. I was at once given hospitality by the collective, put up in one of the members' cottages, and shown round the farm by the chairman. Chapaevka had now its own cinema and theatre in a building that once had been a church. A sports stadium was being laid out in the centre of the village; there was a pioneer club, a bath-house, a

restaurant; and a rest-home was being constructed at which members could spend their two weeks' paid holiday, now enjoyed by law by all collective farmers.

I happened to arrive at Chapaevka on a Sunday, which in the Soviet villages is still the day off. The club's football team had gone to play a railway workers' team some miles away, and the railway workers had sent a special train to fetch them. In the afternoon the village band played on the verandah of the club, and in the evening there was a film show. Close by the farm there was a gliding school, which had some full-time students, and at which a number of the younger collective farmers studied gliding in their spare time. The farm also had an apiary school attached to it at which about seventy students, paid out of the funds of their own collective farms, were studying the theory and practice of bee-keeping. This Sunday happened to be a notable occasion as the collective had just won, as a premium, its own fire-engine, and the fire-engine was due to arrive that afternoon. When it appeared the whole village turned out to meet it, and a demonstration of its capacity was at once held in order to show that it was capable of soaking the roof of the club, the highest building in the village.

Besides looking round the farm at Chapaevka I also visited the school, where the school-leaving age had already been raised to 17. Most of the children in the advanced group, those of 16 or 17, intended to go on to the university. I personally met potential Red Army commanders, engineers, and agricultural specialists among those children, each one exercising personal choice concerning a career. And these were the children of peasants, of people who had as a whole been illiterate prior to 1917!

In Chapaevka the collective farm community was working well. The people were already enjoying the fruits of a considerably greater productivity than they had previously known, large sums were going into social services of a kind hitherto unknown in the village, and instead of leisure and the vodka bottle being synonymous

as in the old days, they already had their sports club and stadium, cinema and local dramatic club, village band, evening classes, and the children of the village were going to school to the age of 17. Each year technical improvements in production were being introduced, and everyone felt that their community was a progressing one, offering every member an opportunity for a rising standard of life and improving his or her own knowledge and culture.

Later on, near Dnieprostroi, I visited a German collective farm which had introduced electricity throughout, and was now introducing telephones into every house in the village! At this farm they had so developed their business organization that the members instead of waiting till the year's accounts were complete received monthly advances, according to their work, based on what it was estimated would be their share of the total product. In the office there was publicly displayed a complete list of the names of the members of the collective, and the number of work-days performed by each to date. It was interesting to note that the earnings of several wives were superior to those of their husbands, and that the administrative staff, while receiving a fixed number of work-days a month, appeared to earn considerably less than the best workers among the rank and file.

Compared with the old Russian villages the collective farms to-day are unrecognizable. But, like everything in the U.S.S.R., they combine features which are ahead of the rest of the world with features that are still backward compared with Western countries. It should be remembered that the slogan of Lenin for this period of Soviet history was "to catch up and surpass the leading capitalist countries." In some spheres they have caught up and surpassed, in others they are still lagging behind. But I have never found anything in the conditions of the U.S.S.R. that suggests that, within a short period of time, they will not have surpassed all other countries in every respect.

When visiting Chapaevka in May 1936 I had a long

talk with the peasants, old and young, about conditions there and in other countries. As usual, they wanted to know how villagers lived in England, and what the British people thought of the U.S.S.R. They were particularly interested in Spain, where the Franco rebellion had not yet started, but where preparations for the rebellion were known to be going on; for they knew from their own past what resistance landlords could put up against progressive legislation. I was struck by the way the Soviet Press and educational system awaken people's interest in other countries, so that, wherever you go, you are questioned by old and young alike, in private and in public; all are interested, and nobody is afraid to ask a question such as "Do people live better in England than here, or worse?"

I am in a position to contrast this with Poland and Germany, for in June 1936 I returned to England by land and stopped one night in Warsaw. While there I had conversations with several people, and as soon as I mentioned that I had come from Moscow they showed a tremendous interest. A student and an unemployed worker both asked questions about Soviet life with the greatest interest, but repeatedly interjected such remarks as: "You know, we mustn't ask such questions here. We mustn't talk about such things. But people are interested: we know that big things are happening over there". In each case they would only mention the U.S.S.R. when nobody was about. Contrast this with the Soviet collective farmers full of interest in things abroad and not a hesitant question in a public cross-examination of myself on the village green.

Again, passing through Germany, in the railway carriage there happened to be a man and wife, middle-class business people. No sooner did I say that I came from Moscow, than the man became agitated and went into the corridor. In the meantime his wife talked in Russian telling me she was a Jewess who had lived outside Russia for nearly twenty years. "Our friends are Germans," she told me, "so I am all right. But none of them like 'him',

and things are getting more and more difficult. Is it true that Russia has no unemployment? They say we have none here but it's a lie." The husband did not disagree with his wife, but seemed afraid she would be overheard as she told me how even their own middle-class friends hated the present régime. If anyone came along the corridor her husband stood in the doorway of our compartment as if afraid that we should even be seen talking together. Contrast this with the Soviet trains where people chatter continuously and all the time, in crowds, clamour for information about the rest of the world. "Is it true when our newspapers say that they destroy goods to keep up prices while people go without?" "How do they eat and dress in England—it's a very rich country, isn't it?" "Why don't the workers have a revolution as we did?"

I do not want to suggest, however, that in the U.S. S.R. there are not things about which people prefer not to argue. After the trial of Kamenev and Zinoviev, for example, a certain English person whom I know, who had been travelling in Russia, referred to the "embarrassed silence" when she started to ask questions on this subject. Rather the same sort of silence, I imagine, as would have arisen in an English first-class railway carriage at the time of the abdication if a foreigner had been so rude as to start talking about the relations between Edward VIII and Mrs. Simpson; or asking whether the policy of the Communist Party was not *really* the only way out of the world crisis! It must be recognized that there are certain things in every community which people take for granted. To challenge such accepted principles is to reveal oneself as an alien, with the result that embarrassment is caused all round. To reveal yourself as sympathetic to Trotskyists in the U.S.S.R. to-day is as outrageous a violation of accepted standards as it would be to express Communist sympathies at a week-end party at Cliveden! In both communities public opinion will not tolerate certain kinds of views, views which have shown themselves to be fundamentally

opposed to the security of the particular public concerned. More, however, will be said about this when we come to discuss freedom.

I was particularly struck during this tour with the appearance of a small industrial town which was not the capital of a republic and which, except for its industry, had no attraction for the tourist. This was Dnepropetrovsk, whose main boulevard at night had that same light and gay aspect that I had noted in Kiev and which I later found also in Kharkov. Of course, in the U.S.S.R. the State shops burning State electricity remain lighted all night, and this greatly adds to the gaiety of the towns after dark. Dnepropetrovsk had one magnificent 'Park of Culture and Rest,' sloping down to the river, and another great new park had just recently been opened near the centre of the town which, when the trees have grown up, will be extremely pleasant. But I did not come here to see the town, but to find the whereabouts of the German collective farm theatre which I knew to be working somewhere in this province.

Fortunately the manager of the theatre who was in charge of the business side of its affairs was in town, and I found her at the office of the Theatre Trust. No sooner did I tell her that I knew her English colleague Joan Rodker and that I wanted to visit the theatre while it was on tour than I was immediately invited to go with her that night by train. We would be met at a country station by a car from the theatre, and then I could travel with them for two or three days. This was just the kind of thing I wanted, and off we went.

When we speak of a travelling theatre in this country we usually, have in mind some fairly large professional theatrical company on tour. Such companies travel from place to place by train, carry with them vast wardrobes and scenery, and have modern and well-equipped theatres to visit in each town. They do not visit the villages, the paraphernalia of the ordinary theatrical company would be rather too bulky for a village institute. Now in

the U.S.S.R. the road between villages are far from good, and hard tracks through the fields are often the only means of transport. I may add that when in the Caucasus in 1932, in wet weather the local bus traffic was entirely held up. 'Buses' consisted of lorries, with planks set across them for seats. Roads consisted of tracks through the fields; when there was much rain the road was impassable. On this occasion we were kept waiting for a whole day as the garage manager did not know when there would be a bus. And when we did start the mud was so bad that at certain points we left the road altogether, and drove through maize and sunflowers six feet high.

A village theatre, then, must have equipment such as can be carried on one or two lorries. These lorries have also to transport the actors and musicians from place to place. In fine weather, as I experienced it, it is exhilarating driving through the fields, with the scent of wild flowers and a cool breeze, from one village to another. In wet weather, they told me, it is not such a picnic.

The villages served by this theatre in Dniepropetrovsk province were German. When we arrived, the company had just settled for two nights in a new village, and the local club was being adapted for the show. The theatre was supported financially by the Provincial Theatre Trust, but at the same time made a regular charge at each collective farm for its performance. The collective could raise the money as it liked, paying the bill entirely out of communal funds, or paying part that way and charging admission to its members. The agreement always stipulated that the collective farm should provide food and lodging for the group. I happened to be put up at the house of a 'doctor', where I had a sofa-bed in the sitting-room. To my amazement the 'doctor' had the most dirty hands I had ever seen in a surgery, and I remained shocked at this for some twenty-four hours. Only when I happened to walk into the 'surgery' and found that it was an animal doctor that I was staying with did I recover from the shock I had received at what I had taken to

be the local medical service !

The theatre performance itself consisted of two short plays, a short political talk, and then games and dances late into the night. The group made a point in each village of learning local folk-dances and music, and in carrying these from place to place as they travelled round. This theatre happened to perform in German for the inhabitants of the German-speaking villages of the area, but in the U.S.S.R. to-day such theatres are being organized in every district, performing in the language of every people of the Union.

While a number of the actors were real Germans who had taken up acting as a spare-time activity in the Foreign Worker's Club in Moscow and had then been offered by the Commissariat of Education an opportunity to form a full-time professional village theatre, others of the company were drawn from the local peasantry, had studied in the drama school at Dniepropetrovsk, and now were full-time actors. In this way ordinary peasant people were becoming qualified actors in a few years. In this connexion I might mention that in 1936 I was present in Moscow at a competition of collective farm theatres which came from all parts of the U.S.S.R. The average standard was above that of our ordinary English repertory company yet the actors in the best of these theatres were just young working men and women. In one group, from the Gorky province, no actor was over 23 years of age. They had started as a factory dramatic club at the Gorky Automobile Plant. As they had showed great talent, partly as a result of the professional assistance that amateur groups obtain in the U.S.S.R. through agreement with the trade union of theatre workers, they were offered the opportunity to become a 'studio,' that is, a full-time student theatre training to become fully qualified, and from that they graduated into a full-time professional theatre. Such developments are not exceptional in the U.S.S.R., for this is simply one of the ways in which the talent latent in the people is stimulated, developed and used.

In this particular district that I was now visiting there was considerable variation from village to village in the club facilities available. Some clubs had no electric-lighting, so the theatre had to carry its own generator. Some had a well-constructed stage, others were just barns with a rather primitive platform. One modern theatre building was actually in course of construction, and it was intended in the future to settle the group permanently there, and to bring the neighbouring farmers to the theatre rather than take the theatre to one village after the other in the immediate vicinity. But in the case of more distant villages the theatre would still have to go on tour, and it would thus combine work on its own premises and touring according to the needs of more distant villages.

On this journey in 1936 there was one very great difference from my previous long journey in the summer and autumn of 1932. Now nobody spoke of lack of bread, nobody spoke of bad harvests, nobody talked with doubtful words about the new collective system of farming. Everywhere I went, in town or village, people took the collective farm system for granted. Were there any individual peasants? Yes, in most villages there were still a handful of families that had not yet for some reason or other joined the collectives. In some cases they actually wanted to join, but the collectives were not too ready to admit new members after all their difficulties were over and they were rapidly going ahead. The Government has had to instruct every collective to accept those wishing to join, not to exclude anybody because of their past opposition to collectivization.

I returned to Moscow, and after another month, having prepared and delivered several radio talks on my travels, I returned to England at the beginning of June. From here I was able once again to reflect on the differences between the system of society which I had left and the society in which I was born. I was also able to make some study of the Soviet system historically and to consider it theoretically. Was this new system Socialism, or was it

something else? Was it a one-Party dictatorship as contrasted with a free democracy in Britain? Was there really no intellectual freedom in the U.S.S.R., or was this just a myth created in Britain by people who did not understand or understood only too well, and who, therefore, misled others as to the nature of the Soviet system? Finally, what were the pros and cons of the Soviet as compared with our own social system, and what was the significance of Soviet experience likely to be in a world constantly threatened with war and repeated economic crises? These were questions which I only felt fully able to answer after I had once again returned to Britain, had read something more of Soviet theory in the light of my experiences of it in practice, and had once again re-valued English institutions in the light of my experiences on Soviet territory.

It is with some of these problems that I shall now deal in the chapters that follow.

## CHAPTER XIV

### IS THIS SOCIALISM ?

**I** suppose one of the commonest questions asked about the U.S.S.R. is this : "Is it really Socialism?" A rather strange question, but a natural one, considering that well over half the anti-Soviet propaganda at the present time consists in attempts to demonstrate, on the basis of this or that still backward feature of the U.S.S.R., that after all the Russian Revolution has failed to produce a socialist system of society.

Now in 1931 when I first went to Russia I assumed that I was going to a socialist country. After I had lived there for some time, however, I found that Soviet people did not consider that their country was yet completely socialist. On the one hand they had a communist government, but on the other the economic system was still far from being completely socialized, and it was still the period of 'socialist construction'—of translation to a completely socialist organization of society.

In an earlier chapter I have described my impression on returning to London in 1933 after just over a year in Moscow. I also drew a number of comparisons with tsarist Russia, showing the extent to which, in sixteen years, the country had been transformed. But I did not in that chapter survey the tremendous difficulties with which the Soviet Government was faced in attaining such achievements in so short a period of time. When to-day we glibly talk of twenty-one years of the Russian Revolution, we are too often inclined to ignore the difficulties with which it has been faced during this period. When we go so far as to identify to-day's achievements with those of "twenty-one years of socialism" we are still

farther from the mark. Socialism, in its most primitive form, has only been in existence as a fairly efficient working system in industry, agriculture, and trade since the year 1933. Have the years 1917 to 1933, then, been wasted by the Soviet Government? Or, if not, what is the explanation for this tremendous delay in the introduction of socialism?

First of all let us be quite clear what we mean by socialism. To find a definition on which everyone will be unanimous is impossible; but all the same I think that a short and concise definition can be found which brings out the essential features of a socialist system. Socialism means a state of society in which the means of production, land, factories, mines, railways, farms and other means of production are *public* as opposed to *private* property, and where *production* is carried on to meet the needs of the community not for the profit of private owners. It is in this sense that socialism has now been attained in the U.S.S.R.

It should further be noted that there is nothing in this definition to suggest standardization of living conditions or equality of wages. In describing what socialism would be like, at any rate in its early stages, Frederick Engels wrote as long ago as 1878 :

For socialism, which will emancipate human labour power from its position as a *commodity* . . . distribution, in so far as it is governed by purely economic considerations, is regulated by the interests of production, and production is most encouraged by a mode of distribution which allows *all* members of society to develop, maintain and exert their capacities in *all* possible directions.<sup>1</sup>

Engels did not consider equality of earnings to be a feature of socialism at all, but equality of opportunity for every citizen to develop and utilize his or her capacities to the full in the interests of the community.

Marx, in his *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, was

<sup>1</sup> F. Engels, *Anti-Dühring* (Lawrence & Wishart), p. 238.

equally insistent on this matter of socialist distribution. "The distribution of the means of consumption at any period is merely the consequence of the distribution of the conditions of production themselves."<sup>1</sup> In the first stage of communist society "within the co-operative commonwealth based on the social ownership of the means of production," writes Marx, "the individual producer receives back again from society, with deductions, exactly what he gives. What he has given to society is his individual amount of labour." . . . "What we have to deal with here is a communist society, not as if it had *developed* on its own foundations, but, on the contrary, as it *emerges* from capitalist society."<sup>2</sup> Only later on, as a result of tremendous economic progress, will the principle "to each according to his work" be replaced by the communist principle "to each according to his need."

In a higher phase of communist society, after the enslaving subordination of individuals under division of labour, and therewith also the antithesis between mental and physical labour, has vanished, after labour, from a mere means of life, has itself become the prime necessity of life; after the productive forces have also increased with the all-round development of the individual, and all the springs of co-operative wealth flow more abundantly—only then can the narrow horizon of bourgeois right be fully left behind and society inscribe on its banners: from each according to his ability, to each according to his need.<sup>3</sup>

When the new constitution of the U.S.S.R. was adopted on December 5, 1936, numerous comments were made in our press concerning the alleged 'abandonment' of communist principles embodied in Article 118, which states: "Citizens of the U.S.S.R. have the right to work—the right to receive guaranteed work with payment for their work in accordance with its quantity and quality." It will be seen from our quotations from Marx and Engels

<sup>1</sup> K. Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Programme* (Lawrence & Wishart), p. 15.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

that these founders of communist theory did not expect, in the early stages of socialism, any more than this. Reading through their remarks on communist society in its early stages we can see that they conceived of a social order very like that which exists in the U.S.S.R. to-day: Public ownership of the means of production, leading to a situation in which all members of society are encouraged to "develop, maintain and exert their capacities in all possible directions." In the chapters which have preceded this one we have seen how, in the U.S.S.R., such a system is becoming a reality. Distribution has begun to be organized between citizens according to their contribution; that is, their labour. Finally, it is to-day clear that in the U.S.S.R. two processes are taking place which must inevitably lead to that "higher phase" of which Marx wrote.

On the one hand, mechanization is rapidly taking place. Movements like that of Stakhanov are turning manual workers into brain workers, and heavy jobs into mechanized processes. Simultaneously the raising of the school-leaving age is creating a generation of cultured, educated and technically qualified people. Some 40 per cent of Soviet youth have to-day had some form of university or technical education. This means that tedious and heavy jobs are gradually being mechanized, demanding a higher level of intelligence. Work is thus becoming interesting in itself, and even unskilled work, through socialist competition, is given something of the excitement of the sports ground. In these ways labour is ceasing to be "merely a means to live" and becoming interesting enough to be "the prime necessity of life." At the same time the increased mechanization and education is going hand-in-hand with an increased productivity. As I have pointed out earlier, rising wages and falling prices are taking place simultaneously. Such a process, now in operation throughout the U.S.S.R., can in the long run only lead to the kind of society Marx foresaw as the "highest phase of communist society."

I have so far shown what I mean by socialism—the “first phase” of communist society in which the means of production become social property. I have also shown that in the U.S.S.R. there is nothing to stop a steady development to that “higher phase” described by Marx through simultaneously raising production and the material and cultural level of the people, and by making all work interesting. It still remains to point out that not only was the Soviet Government faced with a particularly backward country in 1917, details of which we have already discussed, but that the practical problems with which it was faced seemed almost insuperable. The miracle of the Russian Revolution is not that in twenty years it has just achieved the outlines of a socialist system, but that it has survived at all. And when critics of the present year of enlightenment still find overcrowded dwellings in Moscow, and proclaim their horror, let them take into account the facts which follow, for these facts are as vital to an understanding of Soviet problems as are the facts about tsarist Russia described in Chapter X (pp. 102-116).

In 1917 Russia, one of the most backward countries in Europe, was feeling the disastrous effects of three years of war. Already the economic system was creaking ominously, queues lined up outside the shops in every town, and the desire of the people for peace was rapidly gaining ground. It was in this situation, when no other government would give the people peace, that the Soviets seized power under the leadership of the Bolshevik party in October 1917.

The Soviet Government, in one of its first decrees, nationalized the land, and the peasant soviets were empowered to divide the great estates according to local needs. But the primitive household system of cultivation in the main remained. The Soviet Government also appealed to the whole world for immediate peace, without indemnities or annexations; but this appeal was ignored and war continued. And, on the pretext of defending—

their property interests, one government after another gave support to rebellions by Russian generals against the Soviets; and, as in Spain to-day, a small internal property-owners' rebellion became a war of armed intervention. Ten foreign armies operated on Soviet soil. The combination of ruthless war with the problem of introducing new methods of government and new forms of productive organization had a disastrous result. The invading armies, as they began to be defeated, destroyed every productive unit before retiring. The level of industrial production by 1920 had been reduced to 20 per cent of the pre-war level, and agricultural production fell to a half of that of tsarist Russia in 1913. The country was faced with one of the worst famines in Russian history; not caused by the Revolution but by that war of invasion which an already impoverished country had to face from 1918 till 1921, and in the Far East till 1922.

It was as a result of this disastrous impoverishment that Lenin proposed the New Economic Policy in 1921, a policy devoted entirely to stimulating production, and which gave direct encouragement to capitalist elements as well as to socialist ones within Soviet territory. In January 1924 Lenin died; only by 1927 had the economic life of the country been restored to the pre-war level both in industry and agriculture. This meant, of course, that the living conditions of the people were considerably better than in 1913, for as there were no longer any landlords or rich employers, the supplies of consumer's goods were more equitably distributed than in 1913. Also, the progressive labour legislation of the U.S.S.R. remained a model for the whole world. But a really rapid rise in the standard of life of the whole 150 million people of the Union demanded a vast development of productive resources far beyond anything that had been achieved prior to 1913. It was on this enormous task that the Soviet Government only started in the year 1928, just ten years ago, with the introduction of the first Five-Year Plan.

Once the means of production have become public

property and industrial production organized in the public interest, the only way to raise the standard of life is by increasing production. If there are not enough houses to give adequate accommodation to every family; and if—as is the case in the U.S.S.R.—every available bit of housing accommodation is in use, then the only way to obtain more houses is to build them. But to build houses for 170 million people—the population is increasing by three millions a year—requires vast resources of building materials and skilled labour; and production in the U.S.S.R. in 1928 was just slightly ahead of 1913, and the general level of technique was not much higher than under tsarism.

Faced with this problem, the problem of providing adequate supplies of building materials, modern transport, and factories that could produce consumers' goods on a scale hitherto unknown in Russia—the Soviet Government had first of all to lay the foundations of a heavy industry. You cannot build houses without having building materials, steel and concrete; you cannot produce boots and shoes without leather, boot and shoe factories, and skilled operatives. The first Five-Year Plan aimed, in industry, primarily at building up the supplies of the *means of production* as the only means of raising the standard of life of the whole people.

But while this industrial problem was, comparatively speaking, a simple one, in spite of the backwardness of the country; because already by 1928 practically the whole of the industrial enterprises of the country were under State control and run on socialist lines; the problem of agriculture was a vastly more serious one. Although we were accustomed to speak of the U.S.S.R. as a socialist country in 1928, it must be remembered that until that year the methods of land cultivation had remained as they were prior to 1914. The Revolution had handed over the landed estates to the peasants, and these estates had in most cases been divided among the peasant families (though, in a few cases, they had been turned into large-scale State farms). From 1917 to 1927 the system of

cultivation, based on family holdings each equipped with the most primitive instruments, remained. If prior to 1917 Russia had been a land of famines, in which the *golodovka* occurred in some district or other every year, the Soviet system, prior to 1928, had not fundamentally altered that primitive agriculture which, in itself, perpetuated the recurrence of famines. What the Soviet system did was to distribute the product of the land more equitably, but a more equitable distribution of poverty does not solve ~~the~~ the problem of abolishing poverty altogether. To achieve this a completely new type of farming had to be introduced. Modern large-scale agriculture, with modern machinery, scientific knowledge and instruments, chemical fertilizers and rotation of crops, selective breeding of livestock, and so on, had to replace the old methods.

Now the Soviet authorities could stimulate large-scale agriculture in either of two ways. They could do as other governments had done, and subsidize their larger farmers (those peasants who were rather better off than their neighbours, called *kulaks* in Russia), encourage them to extend their holdings and employ more labour, and thus become the big farmers of the country, using modern methods of cultivation. But already the large farmers had shown themselves time and again to be the enemies of a socialist government, and it was clear that if agriculture got into their hands they would not only oppose all labour legislation on behalf of the Soviet country labourer, but would more and more use their power to withhold supplies from the Government in order to force concessions to their own capitalist class in the countryside. Therefore, the Soviet authorities decided on the only possible alternative, which was to foster large-scale farming not by encouraging the rich peasants to become richer, but by encouraging the vast majority of the peasants who were poor to pool their land and resources, thus setting up large-scale co-operative farms. It could then offer assistance to these collective farms in the form of machinery, scientific advisers, fertilizers, and training in modern farming

methods. The original Five-Year Plan foresaw the collectivization of over 30 per cent of the agriculture of the country, in which large-scale co-operative farms would till the soil by modern methods. At the same time projects were prepared for large-scale State farms, run on the same lines as factories, such as Gigant and Verblud in the North Caucasus, which have been described earlier in this book.

The plan for the gradual collectivization of agriculture, however, did not go smoothly. For this was no ordinary economic plan of peaceful reconstruction; it was a plan which, if successfully carried through, meant an end to private capitalism in the countryside, and which was, therefore, strongly opposed by the richer peasants or *kulaks*, who saw nothing but loss to themselves as a result of pooling their resources with those of their poorer neighbours in the new collective farms. When the propaganda campaign for collectivization was under way the *kulaks* in the villages realized that they, too, must mobilize their forces if this new move by the Government—on which they had never looked too favourably from the time when it stated its determination to establish socialism throughout the country—was to be resisted. Resistance was organized, not limiting itself simply to activities of a propaganda character, but in many places assuming the form of armed resistance by the *kulaks* and whatever support they could muster in their villages. It cannot be over-emphasized that such a conflict was just as inevitable as the war of 1918 to 1921 had been, when the landlords and employers worked with foreign states to put an end to the Soviet system. In the period following 1928, when the State mobilized its propagandists to carry through collectivization, and the *kulaks* mobilized all whom they could to resist, foreign agents were sent into the Ukraine on a considerable scale to assist the *kulaks* in preventing the successful achievement of collectivization. 'Intervention' was repeated. And the very methods adopted by the *kulak* opposition to collectivization com-

pelled retaliatory measures being taken. *Kulak* families were deported in hundreds of thousands and set to work on construction jobs far from their native villages, and for a time certain agricultural areas were in a state almost of armed warfare.

But the most serious result of *kulak* opposition to collective farming was the mass slaughter of cattle. Rather than face collectivization, rich peasants killed their cattle, and incited their poorer neighbours, sometimes successfully, to do likewise. And when the new collectives were organized, they had not always the necessary talent available for immediately introducing efficient large-scale farming, with the result that in many cases the crops were overgrown with weeds during the first year or two of the existence of the new large farms. It was only by 1933 that a record harvest conclusively demonstrated the superiority of the new system, and since then not only grain production but the stocks of livestock too have been steadily increasing. Already in 1937 it was estimated that the increase of sheep and goats in the U.S.S.R. during one year was greater than twice the total number of sheep in the German Reich. And a year or two previously, Mikoyan, the Commissar of the Food Industry, had remarked already that the German sausage was "taking Soviet citizenship," in reference to the already great and still growing variety of sausages provided in the State shops from 1934 onwards.

In this chapter I have tried to make two points clear. First, that in the U.S.S.R. socialism has been achieved and that the system is now working throughout the country along the general lines foreseen by Marx and Engels over half a century ago. On the other hand I have also tried to make clear that socialism has been achieved in the face of tremendous difficulties, and has only been achieved, in the roughest outline, in the past five years. Therefore, taking all the facts into consideration: the backwardness of the U.S.S.R. in certain respects, the quality of housing and clothing, the roads in the villages,

the existence even to-day of a few beggars, these things are not in any way surprising but are to be expected. Nobody with a knowledge of tsarist Russia has ever, to my knowledge, returned to the U.S.S.R. without being impressed at the rapid progress achieved. It seems a little unfair that people, who knew nothing of Russia before the Revolution and seem quite uninterested in the problems it has had to face since 1917, should to-day tell us that this is not socialism because the Soviet Union is not the Utopia of their dreams.

It has sometimes been said, in speech and writing, that the Soviet Union has been able to make a success of its new system because of the backwardness of the country. It is suggested that an advanced country, with its industries already built and with surplus capacity lying idle, could never mobilize the whole people for reconstruction as the U.S.S.R. has done on its territory with vast undeveloped natural resources and with a backward industrial and agrarian system. Such a view appears to me to be quite erroneous. For, if we examine the problems with which the U.S.S.R. has been faced for the past twenty years, it is hard to imagine any one of them that would not have been made lighter if the country had been more advanced materially and culturally. A more or less illiterate population in 1917 is now more or less literate. But if it had been literate then, how rapidly would the educational system have been developed for the use of every adult! The fact that the country has vast natural resources is an asset, but there is no asset in the fact that these resources were completely untouched in the main and that the means of exploiting them—factories and mines and farming machinery—have had to be provided under the soviet system itself. If the U.S.S.R. had had the resources at its disposal that Britain has to-day for its people, it could have introduced a six-hour day instead of an eight-hour day in 1917, paid holidays of at least a month instead of a fortnight, and it would have been able to provide better food, housing, and clothing in twenty years than has actually been the case.

All the evidence goes to show that the backwardness of the country has been the main obstacle to the successes of the new system ; not that it has fostered these successes.

And even to-day the previous backwardness of Russia still shows itself in certain aspects of living conditions. The appalling overcrowding in the towns of the U.S.S.R. is not something caused by the Revolution, it is a survival, which has certainly been intensified to some extent by the rapid growth of the town population. But such a rapid growth of the town population has itself been necessary as the only means of developing that industry which will make possible a real improvement of housing conditions. Therefore, when we survey the developments of the U.S.S.R. as the world's first socialist country, let us always bear in mind that in 1917 it was one of the world's most backward countries, and that socialism is in its infancy, and even now has only been in full working order in town and country for a period of five years.

In the future, people will look back on these first twenty years of the Soviet system as the 'primitive' period when socialist organization was being attempted for the first time. They will look back at the developments of the first twenty years of the Soviet Republic as a period of innovation and change in which the new system was being introduced against all kinds of obstacles and hostile world. They will regard such things as the seven-hour day and two weeks' holiday as just the first social improvements which the new kind of government was able to introduce. These are matters which we must always bear in mind, for otherwise we lose our perspective of what is occurring.

## CHAPTER XV

### THE QUESTION OF FREEDOM

**W**HEN interviewed by Roy Howard in 1935 Stalin discussed among other things the question of freedom. And he made this statement :

It is difficult for me to imagine what "personal liberty" is enjoyed by an unemployed person, who goes about hungry, and cannot find employment. Real liberty can only exist where exploitation has been abolished, where there is no oppression of some by others, where there is no unemployment and poverty, where a man is not haunted by the fear of being to-morrow deprived of work, of home and of bread. Only in such a society is real, and not paper, personal liberty possible.<sup>1</sup>

These words are the key to the Soviet conception of freedom : and, from the point of view of the ordinary man or woman in every country, security is the prime necessity for any kind of real freedom. Only when security is assured, as in the U.S.S.R., can the ordinary working man or woman begin to develop the mind and to enjoy that intellectual life which people of the middle class so highly value, and rightly so. But the experience of the Soviet people has shown that such a system, providing security and a steadily rising standard of life for all, can only be achieved by completely transforming the whole economic and social life of the country. It was only as a result of the working people's assertion of their right to run the factories, and the peasants' assertion of their right to the land, that the Soviet State came into existence. And under the new system it was only by the workers actively participating in running their factories, in the

<sup>1</sup> *Soviet Union* 1936, p. 55.

peasants' active participation in village administration, that any progress was possible, economically or socially. The working people, therefore, found that by asserting their right to freedom they were able to set up such a social system that provided them with amenities hitherto undreamt of, whether in the sphere of economic security or opportunities for education and intellectual development.

But such a new system of society was not welcomed by the old rulers of Russia. The assertion by the peasants of their freedom to own the land was a denial of the freedom of the landlord to own that same land. And the assertion of the workers' committees of their right to control the management of the factories was a denial of the freedom of the employers. In 1918, to put an end to the lying propaganda of the privately owned press, the newspapers were made public property and turned over to the organizations of the working people. This brought freedom to own the whole press to the mass of the people for the first time, but it was a denial of the freedom of the old owners who had previously controlled the press simply because they were wealthy enough to do so.

The Russian workers and peasants found that, as soon as they asserted their claims to enjoy the kind of freedom that the landlords and employers had previously enjoyed, these old rulers of the country resorted to force to overthrow the Soviets. And they found that, in the war against counter-revolution, the possession of the means of propaganda was quite as important as the possession of arms. As a result of this bitter struggle there emerged a community organized in the interests of those that worked but which no longer allowed the old freedom to the possessors of wealth. But the replacing of representatives of the old régime by the new did not only concern factories and the land. It also affected the educational institutions, for the Soviet Government threw open these institutions to the working people. Certain professors refused to teach students drawn from the ranks of the common people. Others, while consenting to continue their

work, openly showed that they despised their new pupils, or would openly express their sympathy with those enemy forces that were trying to wipe out the new system. The students, in such conditions, would correctly complain that such a teacher was "not one of us," and would ask for the removal of such a professor or other teacher in favour of someone who was ready to give of his best to the new type of student. This is democracy.

At the same time the new socialist government, born of a struggle against imperialism, had to provide new text-books in conformity with the new outlook on life which it represented. No longer could the old prejudiced tsarist text-books be used, with their Russian chauvinism, their hostile attitude to the smaller nations, their constant exaltation of the tsar and of a system that treated the working people like so much cattle. But many teachers refused to adopt the new text-books and to abandon the old Russian imperialist teachings. These people had to be replaced as no longer doing their job properly, just as in Britain to-day a teacher in a church school who refused to teach scripture would undoubtedly be removed from his or her post.

And so it came about that, in a period of acute social conflict, the anti-Soviet professors were replaced by the pro-Soviet; the snobs were replaced by people who understood the creative potentiality of students drawn from the rank-and-file of the working people.

And to this day the arbiter of such matters, such as the fitness of a teacher to hold his or her position, is to a great extent the students themselves. I know personally of one case in Moscow where a teacher lost his job because the students complained of his attitude. He was an Englishman; he held a number of views which public opinion in the U.S.S.R. rightly or wrongly identified with hostility to the Soviet system. Students went to the administration, said that this teacher "was not one of us," and asked for somebody else against whom they would not feel the same instinctive antagonism. As a result of this

democratic protest the teacher was replaced. "There is no freedom of thought" in Russia may well have been the reaction of the teacher. On the other hand it might be concluded from this example that in the U.S.S.R. students have a freedom to choose their teachers which is greater than elsewhere. Which, we may ask, represents the greatest freedom for the greatest number?

I have described already how, on first starting work in the U.S.S.R., I was rather taken aback to find that my students seemed unable or unwilling to indulge in controversial discussions of the type to which we are so accustomed in this country. I was inclined to put it down to a standardized outlook, as something unnatural and abnormal, for it was so different from that attitude of mind to which I had been accustomed in Cambridge and Bangor. But by degrees, when I became more accustomed to Soviet conditions, I found that the explanation of this lack of controversy rested not on any sort of artificial standardization but rather on the fact that people shared a common outlook on life, whereas in this country I had been brought up in a community in which people shared no such common outlook. Just because we in Britain have not lived through that desperate struggle to introduce a new system of society, so we have not that unity of outlook that such a struggle creates. In the U.S.S.R. I met people who had lived under capitalism and who had participated in the struggle for the new system, both in the sphere of active military service and in the world of propaganda and education. They had found from experience that the old system defended itself not only by arms but by its education and propaganda, and they were determined that just as it had been defeated in the one sphere it should be defeated in the other also.

My first experiences with Soviet students showed me that it was impossible among them to organize that kind of controversial debate that is so common among our students in Britain. At first I could not see why this was impossible. Like André Gide, at that time my reaction

was that they had "standardized minds." But to-day, looking back and again contrasting England with the U.S.S.R., I find that I react quite differently. "There," I say, to-day, "people are united in working out their common salvation from poverty, backwardness, physical insecurity and mental ignorance." And when a whole community is united on such a task, when the whole social and economic system is operated to carry such a task through to a successful completion, then people are no longer interested in academic discussions on "what is progress" or "how progress can be organized," they are interested in discussing how the existing rate of progress can be accelerated. To put it concretely : to Soviet students discussions on how to improve the work of their own university, or how to improve the amenities of their hostel, are of vital importance. They no longer need to debate the question of how a system can be attained in which students can participate in running their universities, for they have got there already. They, and everyone else, are interested in accelerating the present rate of social advance, and in all our discussions of freedom in the U.S.S.R. we must first recognize this basic community of interest which exists in Soviet society as opposed to the fundamentally opposing interests which we have here and which give rise to all kinds of conflicting doctrines.

We must never forget that while the striking feature to us in the U.S.S.R. is the unity of outlook of the people, to a Soviet citizen coming to this country the reverse is the case. I have met a great many Soviet citizens in this country. And they are struck here by what they consider to be the woolly-minded, unclear, muddled conception of society which people seem to have in Britain. Far from congratulating us on having a freedom which gives rise to an infinite variety of ideas, they will taunt us with having a system in which every possible conception of human society is encouraged but the scientifically correct one. They will point to the millionaire ownership of the press, to the domination of our universities by the donors of funds,

i to the vast power of a handful of rich property owners, and they will tell us that our society is divided against itself. They will tell us that the one really scientific conception of society, that which is based on Marxism, is most effectively banned from our press, our radio, our universities, and our schools. The result, they will point out, is that we are all at loggerheads against ourselves, each one is free to put forward his own wrong view against the wrong view of another, but the one thing needed to organize the community in the interests of the common people is lacking. This, they will tell us, is a scientific understanding of the society in which we live, together with a common united policy of progress based on this understanding.

And after living in the Soviet Union I have come to appreciate this view. I have done a certain amount of lecturing since I returned, and I have spoken a great deal for educational institutions of one kind or another. And I have been repeatedly impressed by the fact that here in Britain, as soon as it comes to questions which intimately affect our daily lives, our educational institutions seem for more interested in putting forward simultaneously a variety of different conceptions of society than in discovering a single one which is scientifically correct. Any question of economics, history, or social science—all of which are inevitably bound up with politics—is dealt with in order that “all points of view” may be expressed rather than with the aim of finding one point of view which is scientifically true. And, strangely enough, that one point of view which in the U.S.S.R. is put forward as scientifically correct is very rarely given its due in this country by even those who profess to give the broadest survey of “all the existing points of view.”

In the U.S.S.R., in contrast with this, I found that economics, history, and philosophy were all being taught as *science*. The aim was not to provide “food for thought” by giving the student a hotch-potch of conflicting theories—all of which, however, took the existence of capitalism as fundamental; but to give the students a scienti-

fic conception of human history in which economics and human thought were shown in their right perspective. And I must admit that, having been trained in economics in Cambridge and having taught the same subject for two years in North Wales, it was only in Moscow that I found the subject being taught in a way which really explained the present world situation. And I found that there, in Soviet Moscow, this satisfactory teaching was based on books which were not even included in our own recommended list in Cambridge, and which, even where recommended in other universities, were so much decried by lecturers and in our easier text-books that ordinary students never dreamt of reading them. When, therefore, people say to me that in the U.S.S.R. students are only free to learn what the authorities want them to my answer is "Yes, that is so;" but the authorities there are interested in teaching scientific history and economics, while in this country everything possible is done to prevent them from achieving that scientific understanding. I, therefore, find that they are more free there than here to obtain a scientific understanding of the society in which they live.

And then I am told there is no academic freedom in the Soviet Union. I am asked: "Is it not true that professors are sacked there, as in Nazi Germany, if they do not teach the right thing?" Yes, they are sacked in the U.S.S.R. if they do not do their job properly. And their job: to teach scientific history, economics and philosophy, not to teach the unscientific history, economics and philosophy of the capitalist world.

I have already remarked that I have personally been a student of economics in Cambridge and a lecturer in North Wales. In the U.S.S.R., I have attended classes on economics. In both countries the student is trained in a particular system of ideas to the exclusion of another system. In Cambridge Marx's *Capital* was not a recommended book. But all the recommended books practically without exception discredited Marx's *Capital* as not being economics at all, as not being worthy of the name of science.

In Bangor we taught economics based on the doctrines of Alfred Marshall and others; economics which took the present economic system for granted and recognized no other. The student's mind was trained to accept the work of the capitalist economists—to reject the work of that great economist Karl Marx without even reading it. In Moscow, on the other hand, the recommended books are those of Marx and his followers, books which scientifically study capitalism as a stage in human development, but which fully explain the contradictions within the capitalist system which were never adequately explained to me in Cambridge and which I never explained to my students in North Wales. In fact, I found that the set books of the Soviet students did really explain the economics of the present-day world. I felt bitter resentment that for five years I had been led to believe that I had been studying economics as a 'science' while the really scientific books on the subject had been most effectively withheld from me. They had not, of course, been openly withheld—they were on the bookshelves, but they were only mentioned in a derogatory way, they were not worthy of serious study, they were not 'science.' And, on top of all this, I had constantly been told that this was a free country, that my mind and ideas were 'free' to develop as 'I' wanted them to. What hypocrisy, I felt!

But in Moscow there was no such hypocrisy. You study Marxist economics because this is *science*. Certainly your recommended books are Marxist ones, and you are not advised to take as your text-books the works of the school of Alfred Marshall. But you can refer to these capitalist text-books if you want. But only research students ever want to do so, for after all, a student of chemistry is not interested in reading text-books on alchemy just to "broaden his mind." And when, in Soviet universities, anti-Marxist professors have been replaced by Marxists, this is precisely analogous to what happens in this country if a chemist and an alchemist were to apply for a professorship of chemistry. The alchemist to-day

is no longer free to hold a chair of chemistry in a British university. Quite right, you will agree. But it is a suppression of freedom as far as the alchemist is concerned. The replacing of superstition by science limits the freedom of the superstitious. And as there can be an infinite number of incorrect superstitions for every correct scientific theory, the spread of science does, to that extent, standardize human thought. There was a far greater variety of interpretations of the nature of the stars in the days of astrology than in the days of astronomy. So, too, there are to-day a far greater variety of economic theories all taught simultaneously under capitalism than there are in the U.S.S.R. But if, as Soviet citizens believe, all the various theories taught here are unscientific while the one theory taught in the U.S.S.R. is scientifically correct, this is not a justifiable reason for attacking the Soviet Union as suppressing intellectual freedom. It is cause for congratulating the U.S.S.R. on its promotion of truth, of real social science. When, further, we realize that it is very nearly as hard for a Marxist to become a professor of economics in Britain as it is for a non-Marxist to become a professor in Moscow, and quite as hard in Germany or India we see that we are faced with two systems, each with its own outlook, and each defending its own viewpoint. But if we accept Soviet economics as scientific and our own as unscientific, then we must conclude that only in the U.S.S.R. is economic thought given an opportunity freely to develop along scientific lines, in this country our minds are steadily and consistently warped and forced into unscientific channels. Freedom to find the truth is thus greater there than here.

This question, then, is not a question of Freedom *versus* Suppression: it is a choice between different kinds of freedom. If you have been able to compare Marshallian economics with Marxist economics as I have done, and if as a result you conclude that Marxist economics are scientific whereas the economics of capitalism have steadily moved away from science since the days of Adam Smith and

Ricardo into a sort of mythology of their own, then you can only welcome the Soviet system of training and condemn our own. If, on the other hand, you still believe that all our conflicting economists' views are Science and that Marxism is not, then, you will welcome the system in operation here. But whatever you do, do not imagine that there is in fact much greater freedom for the Marxist to hold a chair of economics in a British university—and teach what he thinks—than there is for an anti-Marxist in the U.S.S.R. to hold a similar position. Because, up to the present, there has been no such freedom.

If, however, owing to a growing recognition that Marxist thought is truly scientific, public opinion were to force our universities to change their views on this question, and we had the promotion of Marxists to leading positions, then, inevitably, those who were anti-Marxist and were replaced by Marxists would have the same complaint here as has been made against the U.S.S.R. They would find themselves being deprived of their freedom. They would have precisely the same grouse as every alchemist has had when chemistry has put him out of business, that every astrologer has had against the rise of astronomy, that every Christian Scientist has when a doctor is brought in to save a patient whose life is in immediate danger.

What I have said about economics also applies, in my view, to the teaching of history and of philosophy in the U.S.S.R. I have attended a course on the history of philosophy in Moscow which I can only describe as brilliant. But it was not a great professor who took that class but quite an ordinary teacher. His brilliance was not personal, it lay in his method, which was to teach the history of human thought scientifically. I envy the young Soviet students their freedom to have the history of human thought put before them in such a brilliant way. Our own students are deprived of this freedom, since Marxist philosophers are no more encouraged than Marxist economists in our own universities. And the same thing applies, in its turn, to history.

In considering freedom of thought in the U.S.S.R. then, we must first of all recognize that every social system has its own orthodoxy. Capitalist thought includes, within its orthodoxy the semblance of variety through the encouragement of 'original' views, even though they may all be unscientific and inaccurate. Soviet thought concentrates, in its orthodoxy, in establishing scientifically correct conceptions of human society and human thought. To the adherents of the former tradition the latter appears, at first, to be crude standardization. Then, as we study it we see that such a standardization is simply due to the transition from a variety of superstitions to one truth, a transition that continually takes place in every sphere of human thought as scientific knowledge replaces prescientific speculations.

"Suppose," I am sometimes asked by a writer, "I wrote a book in the U.S.S.R. to-day that for some reason or other was not approved by the authorities, would I be able to get it published?" And I answer, quite frankly, "No." Because, in the U.S.S.R. to-day publishing is carried on by the State, the trade unions, the Communist party and other public organizations, all of which are working together for the building up of the Soviet community. Since all these publishing houses are public and not private institutions, they will consider what they publish, not from the standpoint of private profit, but of the public interest. They will, therefore, choose to print those things which appear to be in the public interest, not things which are not. The works of Shakespeare and Tolstoy will be printed in hundred of thousands of copies, 'penny dreadfuls' will not be printed at all. This, most people will agree, is an advantage of the Soviet system. Books by Lenin and Stalin will be produced in millions of copies, books by Hitler and Trotsky will not be printed at all. This you will consider good or bad according to your politics.

Under capitalism we have publishing as a profit-making concern in which publishers consider the possible

market for what they print while taking into consideration the extent to which certain books conform to their own outlook on life. The result is that publishing is not carried on as a social service as it is in the U.S.S.R. The choice then is between control by publishers interested in making profits and control by public authorities interested in rapidly raising the cultural level of the community.

Experience shows, however, that as soon as there is a serious threat to the interests of the capitalist state and the capitalist class, even private publishing firms under our system are not free from State control of what is published. If we take the British libel laws, blasphemy laws, official secrets acts, and all the other legislation which, in one way or another, permits censorship by the Government and can be applied rigorously whenever expedient, we see our own freedom potentially limited all the time, and inevitably limited in an emergency. If we extend our consideration to a country with some four hundred million people like India, we find that even many publications of the Left Book Club are not allowed to enter that country under British rule. Our British freedom, taken as a whole, then, is no greater than Soviet freedom, the important question, as in the case of academic freedom which we have just discussed, is simply this: Who decides and in whose interests? In both cases freedom is limited by the aims of the particular state and those whom it serves. The question which lovers of freedom must ask is this: In an unfree world, in a world where war is going on at this very moment, which system in the long run, socialism or capitalism, is going to provide the greatest possible development of the individual as a free and independent citizen? Having answered this question, we must recognize that measures taken by a socialist state in what is, after all, an emergency situation—a war situation—will inevitably be more restrictive than they will ultimately be when there is no longer a war menace.

There is a common belief in this country that in the U.S.S.R. there is no religious freedom. This belief is

unfounded. 'It is true, however, that in certain respects the churches of the U.S.S.R. suffer certain material disabilities compared with their fellows in other countries. They cannot draw an income from land or capital any more than anyone else can. And it should be mentioned that the Russian Orthodox Church suffered a serious blow when it was deprived of this revenue, just as the Church of England would suffer greatly if deprived of its income from rents—including slum rents—and tithes at the present time. Secondly, the churches cannot run organized religious teaching for children. Why, after all, says the Soviet State, should we allow groups of children arbitrarily to be brought up as Catholics or Baptists or Russian Orthodox? We are atheist, we care for none of these sects. Therefore, religious teaching of the young, except within the family circle, is forbidden. As the minds of our children become mature, then they can gravitate to the churches if they wish. But we have no right to inject them with religion with all its emotional power before they can think for themselves. Finally, no longer are the press and the radio available to the churches for religious propaganda in the U.S.S.R. Instead of having to tune-in to Radio-Luxemburg to escape religion on a Sunday, Soviet citizens have to tune-in to Warsaw to get it.

On the other hand, however, every citizen has always been free to express religious views. \*I have told of the Baptist nurse who looked after me in hospital, and on another occasion a woman student repeatedly lectured one of my classes on religion. No attempt is made to suppress such expression of religious views. Further, any group of citizens wishing to carry on religious worship has the right to premises free of charge. But they must raise enough money to pay their priests and other officials and to provide for the upkeep of their building. Only in the case of an overwhelming vote in the locality can a church be shut.

When people in this country talk of the spread of

atheism in the U.S.S.R. as something almost cataclysmic I am rather surprised. For I personally have seen nothing happen in the U.S.S.R. with regard to the declining public interest in religion that is not happening, though to a lesser degree, also in Britain. I sometimes read religious periodicals and find that there is hardly a single religious persuasion in Britain to-day that is not faced by a 'crisis,' and is trying to find ways and means of attracting the youth. People become bitter because in the U.S.S.R. a number of churches have been turned into cinemas and clubs, but in Britain I find that the same thing is happening. Only entrance to the cinema show or club is sometimes contingent in this country on first of all attending a religious service. In Britain to-day the younger generation is showing a declining interest in religion. So it is in the U.S.S.R. But whereas in Britain this is happening in spite of compulsory scripture in the schools, and the existence of church schools and Sunday schools, in spite of a vast amount of broadcasting time devoted to religion, and in spite of extensive Press publicity for religion, and, finally, in spite of the right of religious organizations to run profit-making functions and to draw vast incomes from the ownership of land and capital; in the U.S.S.R. the churches to-day have none of these purely material and institutional supports for their spiritual work. If religion is a necessity to the human soul then religion to-day in the U.S.S.R., liberated from the domination of economic interests and profit-making enterprise, has a grand opportunity to prove it. If religion is, as the Marxists believe, only kept alive to-day by social conditions and the institutions of capitalist society, then in the U.S.S.R. it will undoubtedly die out. If religious faith is really divinely inspired it has every opportunity to survive in the U.S.S.R., for every young man or woman, inspired by the desire for spiritual food, can go to one of the many churches catering for them. But if it is something human and social, kept alive by a particular social system and institutions, by capturing the immature and

defenceless minds of the young, and by a vast radio and press propaganda, in that case it cannot survive in the U.S.S.R.

Many people in the U.S.S.R. believe that they have liberated their children from mental oppression through the Soviet laws on religion. History will show. But anyway, whether religion survives in the U.S.S.R. or dies, nobody can deny that a religion that is based on personal conviction and not on economic and institutional power has complete freedom to express itself in public worship on Soviet territory to-day ; and I do not think anyone can deny, either, that the problems of the churches of the U.S.S.R. differ in anything but degree from the problems facing religion throughout the world.

## CHAPTER XVI

### THIS ONE-PARTY BUSINESS

**I**N the U.S.S.R. there is only one political party. I knew this before I went there, and I was interested to see to what extent such a one-party system could in any way be claimed to be democratic. During my first year on Soviet territory, I discussed the question of the one-party system probably more than any other subject. "How can you have democracy with only one political party?" I would ask. And the answer would be "Why *should* we have more than one party? Our party is a party of the working-class, and we have a working-class State. We don't want parties of the capitalists working to overthrow our socialist State." All right, I would grant this. "But how about differences in view among the workers themselves? Surely you may have different working-class points of view which could express themselves through different political parties?" "All those differences can be settled within our party and the Soviet State without any need to build up separate political parties on such issues." I was dissatisfied; I firmly believed that a time would come when some sort of 'non-conformist' movement would develop, breaking away from the domination of one political party. It was only the experience of living and working under Soviet conditions and then returning to England and again seeing conditions here that changed my mind on this point.

The greatest confusion concerning the one-party system in the U.S.S.R. arises, I believe, from a misunderstanding of what that party is. It is not a parliamentary party at all, and I only began personally to realize this as

time passed and as I saw the party in action and the attitude of ordinary people towards it. Most revealing of all, I suppose, was the 'party cleansing' that took place in the autumn of 1933, and at which I was present.\* Now the Communist party of the Soviet Union claims to be the "organized vanguard of the working-class"—that is, it claims to consist of the best representatives of the working population, those most able to participate in leadership, to take responsibility and to show initiative in the general work of organizing social progress. But no organization that makes such claims can hope to substantiate them unless it has the closest working connexion with ordinary people, and tests its members in the light of public opinion. The 'party cleansing' is a procedure by which, every so many years, all members of the party must, in public at the place where they work, give an account of their activities, their political history, the work which they are doing at the present time, and justify their claim to be members of the "organized vanguard" of the working population.

At such meetings, which are open to the general public, anyone may ask questions, and anyone may speak, either in favour of or against the person whose 'cleansing' is in progress. Thus, while a certain Communist may make out what appears to be quite a good case, the questions and discussion may show that in the past this person has not played the part he claims, that in his or her work there are serious defects which bring no credit to the party, or that, in his domestic affairs and private life he behaves in a way not likely to command the respect of other citizens. Each and all of these faults may be sufficient to cause a party member to be expelled if the criticism is sustained.

At a meeting at which I was present a certain party member who was being 'cleansed' was asked some very sensational questions by a Red Army man in the audience.

\* See note, p. 205.

The Communist had claimed to have been a member of the party since 1917, but the Red Army man in audience, who had come specially for this cleansing, accused him of having served on the side of the Whites at the very time that he claimed to have been a Bolshevik. Obviously this was not a matter that could be settled on the spot, and the man levelling the accusations was asked to send to the Cleansing Commission, in writing, a full statement of his allegations, and the matter was adjourned for a special inquiry. In other cases the question of a person's morals might be raised if he or she were considered by anyone to be leading a dissolute life—for public opinion has its standards in the U.S.S.R. as elsewhere, and demands exemplary lives from Communists. Or, finally, behaviour at his place of work, lack of responsibility, a domineering attitude to subordinates, laziness—all these things might be brought forward.

Of particular seriousness (in 1933) was dishonesty by an individual as to his or her past political activities. I never heard a word of criticism of a Communist who, at the 'cleansing,' gave a full and detailed account of his past activities, even if he had been at one time definitely hostile to the Revolution. So long as he told his story straightforwardly no questions were asked. But as soon as a person appeared vague and to be hiding something, then he was at once subjected to the most ruthless cross-examination both by the audience and by the Cleansing Commission itself. In the U.S.S.R. political dishonesty is considered one of the most discreditable personal attributes. To give false information about one's own past career is considered as damning as to give false testimonials in this country on applying for a job. A pity some of our own politicians who consistently give themselves 'false testimonials' are not subject to that popular form of examination which is used in the U.S.S.R.!

To those who lived through the Russian Revolution and saw other political parties suppressed because they tried to seize power by force when they no longer could

hope to do so by legal democratic means, the prestige of the Bolshevik party grew as the prestige of these other parties declined. And as early as 1921 Lenin introduced 'party cleansing' as a means of ensuring that, within the party that professed to be the leadership of the whole working population, people should not be able to make careers for themselves who did not command the full respect of their fellow working citizens. It was as a result of the good leadership of the party, and of the possibility, through the 'cleansing,' for the general public to decide who should be in such a party, that the people of the U.S.S.R. began to regard the party, like the State, as 'ours' in a new way, and did their utmost to strengthen it as their own organization of leadership.

In Britain to-day if we had a working-class party that subjected its membership to such public and democratic control, this membership might be reduced to one-tenth of what it is, but the quality of this membership would be such that when it then put up candidates in national and local elections people would at least know that these individuals had been publicly approved as the most worthy working citizens—a knowledge which we unfortunately do not have to-day concerning either parliamentary or local candidates.

Not only did I find Soviet citizens referring with enthusiasm to 'our party' and 'our government,' but time and again to 'our Stalin' in the most enthusiastic terms, in words almost nauseating to the ear of the intellectual trained in the tradition of Western parliamentary democracy. And I must admit that it took me some time before I could adjust myself to this particular kind of 'adulation of the leader,' to use the phrase of Sidney and Beatrice Webb. It was only after returning to England in 1936 that I saw this particular aspect of Soviet life in perspective.

First—and this is the point which I emphasize in *Soviet Democracy*,<sup>1</sup> written during my first year in England

<sup>1</sup>Pat Sloan, *Soviet Democracy* (Gollancz), pp. 207-9.

after five years in the U.S.S.R. : There is no doubt that differences of languages cause considerable misunderstanding. It is not only Stalin, the leader of the U.S.S.R., who finds himself made the object of all kinds of adulatory phrases from the mass of the people. Even certain socialist leaders in countries with a strongly, often violently, anti-socialist government and bureaucracy, have the same experience. Jawaharlal Nehru, leader of the Congress socialists of India, writes as follows :

My very popularity and the brave addresses that came my way, full (as is, indeed, the custom of all such addresses in India) of choice and flowery language and extravagant conceits, became subjects for raillery in the circle of my family and intimate friends. The high-sounding and pompous words and titles that were often used for all those prominent in the National movement, were picked out by my wife and sisters and others and bandied about irreverently. I was addressed as Bharat Bhushan (Jewel of India), Tyagamurti (Embodiment of Sacrifice); and this light-hearted treatment soothed me. . . .<sup>1</sup>

In face of this, remember two things : First, that the languages of the U.S.S.R. are much closer to those of India than to that of England; secondly, that if the Congress Socialist party ever becomes the governing party in India, and pursues a popular policy, then the adoration of Nehru, great as it is to-day in face of every kind of official opposition, is going to increase a thousandfold. Transfer the scene to the U.S.S.R., and you get a picture of the attitude of the people to Stalin to-day and you see that such phrases are no artificiality but the expression of popular feeling about a popular leader whose popularity is based entirely on the policy that he represents.

There is no evidence that Stalin, any more than Nehru, enjoys being the subject of mass affection expressed in highly decorative language. Lion Feuchtwanger, who discussed this as well as other matters with Stalin personally,

<sup>1</sup> Jawaharlal Nehru : *An Autobiography*, p. 207.

writes : "It is manifestly irksome to Stalin to be idolized as he is, and from time to time he makes fun of it."<sup>1</sup> And I personally remember one of Stalin's speeches in which he ridicules those people who, instead of getting on with their work send letters of greeting to the leaders couched in the most loyal terms.

Such was my explanation of this 'adulation of Stalin' at first on returning from the U.S.S.R. in 1936. However, having seen more of affairs in this country by now, I feel that in stressing this linguistic explanation I neglected another more important fact. This is the fundamental difference between the U.S.S.R. and Britain to-day in the popular attitude to leadership. In Britain to-day there is no political or trade union leader who commands overwhelming public respect throughout the country. Therefore, there is a tendency to take it for granted that a leader is someone to be criticized rather than respected, opposed rather than followed. And we have become so used to this situation that we are only too often inclined to identify it with 'democracy;' whereas, in fact, it is a symptom of the most unhealthy state of democracy, a democracy in which rank and file and leaders are at logger-heads, a democracy divided against itself.

And when progressive people to-day in democratic countries talk of unity they mean precisely this : a unification of masses and leaders in a common effort. Any such unification must inevitably lead to the mass of the people having a far greater respect for their leaders than they have in this country to-day. As in Spain, leaders will more and more become objects of respect and even 'adulation' the more they represent a united popular movement. But for political leaders at this critical time to win popular support they must in turn show due respect for the masses. If Sir Walter Citrine or Neville Chamberlain had said : "Leaders may come and go, only the People are eternal," they would be better democrats, not worse ones. And the

<sup>1</sup> Lion Feuchtwanger, *Moscow* 1937 (Gollancz), p. 93.

people of Britain would respect them infinitely more for that attitude to the rank-and-file of the people than they respect them now. But it is Stalin 'the dictator' not Citrine and Chamberlain the 'democrats' who recently coined that very telling phrase.

No political leader in contemporary Europe has so emphasized the importance of the masses of ordinary people in making history as Stalin has done. And, conversely, no political leader in contemporary Europe has so won the respect of the masses of ordinary people. We hear far too often of the 'adulation of Stalin' in the U.S.S.R. The criticism is one-sided. If the masses in the U.S.S.R. are guilty of adulation of their leader, that leader is equally guilty of adulation of the masses. And so long as it is mutual it is real democracy. The fascist leaders do not tell us that "only the masses are eternal," nor do our British democratic leaders. It has taken a Stalin to realize this and to say it; this is itself ample reason why the masses should respect Stalin as they do.

There are few questions which have been put to me more often since returning to England from the U.S.S.R. than this one: "Can a Soviet citizen get up in a park in Russia and attack Stalin as a British citizen can attack Chamberlain in Hyde Park?" To the British democrat this all too often seems to be the key question. Actually it is beside the point. My answer is: First, that a Soviet citizen certainly could not get up in a Soviet park and attack Stalin without the general public putting him to flight. He would, in fact, meet with the kind of reception that Mosley receives to-day in the streets of London, but a thousand times more fierce, and with this difference—that in the U.S.S.R. the militia would support the public rather than defend a speaker that the public had no desire to hear.

Suppose, in Britain in the future, a government was elected controlled by a progressive party that at once introduced an eight-hour working-day, holidays with pay, free medical treatment for all workers, and full pay

for those who were unemployed through no fault of their own. Such a government, such a party, and the leaders of such a party would command the active support of the overwhelming mass of the British people. They would regard such a government as 'theirs' in a way in which they have regarded no government hitherto. And an example of this is the Popular Front in France where, though by no means all these progressive proposals have been carried out, and though reactionary influences are also working hard even within the Popular Front, the people regard a Popular Front government as 'theirs' in a new way, to such an extent that some of the richest men in France are financing schemes to overthrow such a government by force, to repeat the example of Spain.

Now at the same time that such a government passes its progressive legislation it will meet with ever more serious resistance by the rich employers. In France the government alone was not able to enforce the forty-hour week, it required strikes by the workers in the factories to ensure that the new laws would be applied. In this way any such government, attacking the big property interests on behalf of the vast majority of the population, finds that just as its active supporters among the masses rapidly increase so, too, its enemies more and more resort to sabotage and even preparations for armed rebellion against it. As the situation becomes more serious those progressive leaders who really respect the ranks of the people and appeal to the people to defend their rights, inevitably gain in prestige, those who have no faith in the masses find that the masses have less and less faith in them. Bit by bit political groups who find their mass support declining resort to violent action in a last attempt to keep power in their hands. On doing this, violating the democracy which they may even have supported at a previous stage, they become outlaws. And so a one-party system may develop, in which the people's party, like the State, is regarded by the people as *theirs*, and the leaders of this party and the government become popular figures with

the overwhelming support of the masses of the population behind them. It is in this way precisely that Stalin has achieved his present popularity in the U.S.S.R. And it is as a result of such a process that attacks on such a government and leadership in public parks become, in the view of the people, acts hostile to their democracy.

But this does not mean that all criticism and possibility of criticism disappears. On the contrary in the U.S.S.R. to-day there is more ruthless criticism of bad administration than anywhere in the world. The people wholeheartedly support the present Government and its policy because they see that it works in their own personal interests. But precisely because of this they are strongly critical of every act which distorts that policy and thus reacts against the public interest. And for this reason, in the Soviet Press, one can read to-day the most harrowing stories of inefficiency, abuses of power, and bureaucracy.

Here again, however, let us be clear on one point. I do not know how often I have had quoted to me extracts from the Soviet Press to the effect that, say, in a certain factory 70 per cent of the output is unfit for use. Is this, I am asked, really true of the U.S.S.R. at the present time? And I answer, if it appeared in the Soviet Press, that it most certainly is. But let us make no mistake about this situation: let us not assume that, because such things happen in Soviet factories, therefore, these factories are necessarily much less efficient than factories under capitalism. In our country, too, even in aircraft factories during a period of vast armament development, there are times when 70 per cent of the product is scrap. But under our system there is no freedom of criticism for such things. A firm that is producing bad goods does not publish the fact—or there would be a slump in its shares. A shop that sells adulterated products can get away with it unless the case is taken to court. But in the U.S.S.R. if you suspect that a certain State shop is serving you with adulterated products you can write to the Press about it; you are free to criticize and make known your criticisms.

It is frequently objected by non-Communist 'socialists' that, in the U.S.S.R. to-day, there is, in fact, a dictatorship by the Communist party because it not only dominates the State, but the trade unions and every other popular organization. But how does it 'dominate' these organizations? Only by winning popular support for candidates for office who are party members to such an extent that the party holds a majority on the leading committees of these various organizations. And there is nothing in any way harmful or undemocratic in this. When we in Britain have such a popular political party that, say, 80 per cent of the working population recognize that this party has really succeeded in enrolling the very best representatives of the working people, we too shall be reaching a similar position to that which exists in the U.S.S.R. We shall find that such a party will control the government, and that the mass of the people, having benefited from its policy, will support candidates of this party not only in local elections and national ones, but in the trade unions, the co-operative societies, and in every other democratic organization. We shall, in fact, find that as soon as there exists a real party of the people, effectively enrolling the very best representatives of the people, the people will support candidates put up by such a party in every democratic organization because they will know that under such conditions party membership is a guarantee of the desirability and integrity of the person concerned. Such a party, it is clear, is something absolutely different from our own parliamentary parties as we know them to-day. There is no guarantee whatever that our own political parties consist of the best citizens. There is no means, such as the Soviet 'party cleansing,' to ensure that they shall include only the best citizens. Members may stand as candidates purely because of their wealth and quite apart from their work.

I firmly believe, after living in the U.S.S.R. since 1931, that once the working people of Britain have a political party which really enrolls their best representa-

tives and effectively represents their interests then that party will grow and grow, it will become the leading force in the country, it will become the 'organized vanguard' of the people, and the leaders of such a party, because of their policies and their work, will receive, and rightly so, the same mass support from the rank-and-file of the people as the Communist party of the Soviet Union and its leaders—Stalin, Molotov, Kalinin, Voroshilov, Kaganovitch—do in the U.S.S.R. at the present time.

It is far too often assumed when we speak of the leadership of the party in the U.S.S.R. that all new laws and decisions come, somehow or other, from the leading committees of the party alone. This is not so. When Stalin makes a speech in the U.S.S.R. it is most striking that what he says always applies, so clearly, to concrete problems of the day as faced by every ordinary man and woman. Now Stalin does not receive material for such speeches through divine inspiration, but through the streams of resolutions and local decisions, recommendations and letters to the Press, complaints to the leading party and Soviet authorities from all over the country. No central party or government decision in the U.S.S.R. is taken except as a result of a constant accumulation of information, local decisions and recommendations which show that such a central decision, in such and such circumstances, is necessary.

Some people would have us believe that Stalin personally decides all questions of Soviet policy; but one of the outstanding merits of Stalin as a leader is that, when giving a lead, he has a genius for putting forward a policy that meets the needs of the mass of the people. And as Stalin himself has repeatedly pointed out, no directive from any leading committee is of the slightest use unless it is based on the experience of the ordinary rank-and-file people who do the practical work. Therefore, Stalin would be the last person to claim, for any lead that he gave on any issue, that he was doing anything more than voicing a commonly felt and commonly expressed feeling of the whole people.

Every decision in the Soviet State results from expressions of opinion by ordinary working people in trade union and production meetings, in 'wall-newspapers' and in the Press, in instructions to local soviets, and in letters of complaint to the Soviet Control Commission, to the Supreme Council, to the deputies in the Supreme Council, and to the party leadership. It is as a result of this constant stream of criticism and demands from the ranks of the people that leading committees throughout the U.S.S.R. make their decisions. And, as Stalin has pointed out, if a leading committee makes a decision that does not meet the needs of the people on the job such a decision will be inoperative, and further decisions will have to be made. The U.S.S.R. is such an organic unity that every measure is the product of the collective comments of thousands of people; every measure can only be carried out in practice when it has the effective and active agreement of millions. The rôle of the party is simply to concentrate the work of leadership, to some extent, in order to preserve a unified working-class policy. In order to do this the party must enrol the very best people from the ranks of the workers, for only in that way can its prestige be preserved.

But with such a system, parliamentary politics as we know the game cease to exist. For, once we have a united people, behind a single leadership, working for a common aim, there is no longer a basis for different parties fighting one another.

When I first went to the U.S.S.R., I tried to visualize a future development into parties, according to differences of opinion within the working population itself. But to-day, having lived there, I simply cannot see this happening. For, in order to form a political party it is essential to have some basic common interest. You cannot organize a political party on a single issue for the simple reason that the people who work together on that issue may be completely at variance on another. You can organize a party of employers against a party of workers. You may have different employers' parties, representing funda-

mentally opposed economic interests : export industries *versus* home industries demanding protection, for example. You may have a workers' party standing for co-operation with the employers. But when you have lived through a period in which all the workers and peasants have united and have put an end to capitalism entirely, then there are no longer those permanent sources of conflict that can be the foundation for permanent political parties.

In the Soviet Union to-day there are some people who think that wages are too unequal, there are others who may think they are too equal, there are some who think that the law prohibiting abortion which was introduced some time ago was wrong, others think it was premature, others think it should have been introduced earlier. Some people may like the model statutes for collective farms adopted at a conference of the most outstanding collective farmers, others may think these model statutes are so much nonsense, but I challenge anyone anywhere to form a permanent *political party* uniting one section of the population in the U.S.S.R. on a whole series of such issues, so as to have a concrete political platform and positive policy against another section of the people. You can always draw up 'opposition programme' by opposing everything in an existing policy. But such a programme can never win support in any country unless it shows the mass of the people that they can unite on this programme and all gain something from it. In the U.S.S.R. to-day everybody is gaining from the present policy of the existing government, they wish to accelerate the progress that is being made, not to fight the government that is making such progress because some like one side of its policy and others another, and some dislike one measure and others another.

Under such conditions it is for the workers and peasants and intellectuals, in their own collectives, their trade unions, in the party and in letters and statements to the party, in the soviets, local and national, in letters and interviews with their deputies, local and national, in their

trade union and factory press, in their local press and in the national newspapers, to put forward constantly their views and their demands and their suggestions as to how progress can be accelerated towards a better life for all.

In such a system what rôle can an 'opposition party' play but that of a disintegrator of public enthusiasm and action, an obstructor of progress?

And it is with this point that I want to proceed to the next question, to which I am giving far more space than it should ever have merited. I do this, not because of the essential importance of the question itself, but because of the amount made of it in the press in the rest of the world. You will guess that I allude to the trials of the past two years.

#### NOTE TO 1943 EDITION

The system of holding Party 'cleansings' at definite intervals, has now been abandoned. But at any time any citizen may demand an inquiry into the conduct of any Party member if he or she considers it not worthy of a Party member.

## CHAPTER XVII

### DISCREDITED POLITICIANS

WHEN I started to work in the U.S.S.R. there was no suspicion that by 1938 a large number of people in prominent positions would have been shot as traitors to the country. At that time I frequently raised with Russians the question of Trotsky's exile, not only with those who were wholeheartedly in favour of Soviet policy, but with the critics as well. And, with only one exception during a period of five years, I found consistent dislike of Trotsky among the people with whom I talked. As far as the enthusiasts were concerned, of course, Trotsky's name was anathema. He had been rightly expelled from the U.S.S.R., his policy had always been wrong, he had been an enemy of Lenin before the days of Stalin, and so on. But even amongst the most critical people, among those who, like my landlady, were constantly attacking the Soviet Government and its policy, I never found anyone who thought that under the leadership of Trotsky things would have been better. Among the most disgruntled citizens, when I asked: "Do you want Trotsky back?" the answer was, with one exception in five years, "No; that would be still worse!"

On a number of occasions I also had opportunities to discuss such personalities as Kamenev and Zinoviev, Bukharin, and others like them who, at an earlier stage were far more prominent, who had held very important positions, and who now were in disrepute and seemed always either to be getting expelled from the party or being readmitted after acknowledging their mistakes and pledging themselves to loyalty in the future. Towards these people, I found, the general attitude was one of contempt. I

never met a Soviet citizen during the whole of my visit to the U.S.S.R. who, in discussing these people, did not show the same attitude towards them as loyal members of the Labour Party in Britain to-day display in referring to the names of MacDonald and Thomas. It was precisely as the discredited ex-leaders that these people were regarded, people who were now if anything given too high and responsible posts by the Government and were trusted too much, not too little.

I may say, therefore, that at the very beginning of the present decade I found the Trotskys and Zinovievs in the U.S.S.R. being regarded as the MacDonalds and Thomases of the Revolution. They already had no popular support. And even as far as discontented people were concerned, even they, with few exceptions, appeared quite convinced that their lot would certainly not have been better under the leadership of Trotsky and Bukharin, or Kamenev and Zinoviev.

Why, it may be asked, were these people so regarded? How did it come about that public opinion regarded them as rather irresponsible, rather unreliable individuals as compared with the existing leadership? The answer lies in their past history, in the internal history of the Russian Revolution, of which we in Britain know all too little, and of which I only began to read when living on Soviet territory. Viewed from England, the Russian Revolution appeared to be led by Lenin and Trotsky, Kamenev and Zinoviev. We saw the most vocal personalities, those who appeared most on platforms and wrote the most striking manifestoes and pamphlets. We did not know of the internal conflicts within that leadership, of the questions that were constantly being fought out in the leading ranks of the party itself, we knew no more of these things than we know to-day the details of the internal political conflicts within the Spanish Republic, or within Franco's territory. It was those individuals who spoke loudest and wrote most whose names became known, while those who performed the daily work of quietly organizing the

people in the process of the Revolution were 'unknown soldiers' to the rest of the world.

Now it happened that, before the Revolution, the central leadership of the party was situated abroad, among the emigrants under the leadership of Lenin. Here the central committee of the party drew up its manifestoes and prepared its publications to be smuggled into Russia, and among the writers occupied in this work Kamenev and Zinoviev and Bukharin already became well known at that time. Trotsky, also in exile abroad, and a violent opponent of Lenin and Bolshevism, also became well known for his writings and speeches.

In 1917 the Bolshevik *émigrés* followed Lenin back to Russia. Trotsky also returned to Russia, putting forward his own vision of revolutionary propaganda while bitterly opposing the Bolsheviks. Only in July 1917, when the prestige of the Bolsheviks was rising rapidly, did Trotsky join their ranks. As the year went on and the time for drastic action drew nearer, Lenin began his propaganda for an armed uprising as the only way to avert the imposition of a military dictatorship in the interests of the property owners. And, by October, 1917, the position had become critical. The central committee of the Bolshevik party decided upon an armed uprising in Petrograd; Kamenev and Zinoviev on the central committee opposed such a decision, and when defeated gave full publicity in the press to their opposition, and thus to the secret decision itself. Lenin denounced them in the strongest terms in spite of his "former relations with these former comrades" and demanded their expulsion from the party. "Let Messrs. Kamenev and Zinoviev found their own party from the dozens of disorientated people," he wrote, "the workers will not join such a party."<sup>1</sup> And in a letter written shortly afterwards he remarked that "the only way to restore the workers'

<sup>1</sup> N. Popov, *History of the C.P.S.U.* (Co-operative Publishing Society, Moscow), p. 404.

party to health" is to "rid ourselves of a dozen or so spineless intellectuals, to rally the ranks of the revolutionaries, to go forth to meet great and momentous tasks and to march hand in hand *with the revolutionary workers*."<sup>1</sup> Already, in 1917, when the party became faced with practical tasks and the central committee was no longer mainly concerned with issuing propaganda for smuggling into Russia, Lenin points out the undesirability of having "a dozen or so spineless intellectuals" in the leadership.

Now among the intellectuals in the leadership, certain individuals had their own theories of the Revolution which did not correspond to those of the party. Trotsky, for example, though he joined the party, never gave up his old view that socialism could never be achieved in Russia alone, owing to the fact that the vast majority of peasants in the population would always be an anti-socialist force. Socialism in Russia, in Trotsky's view, could only come as a result of receiving help from a socialist revolution in the rest of Europe. Trotsky also had always opposed the Bolshevik conception of 'democratic centralism,' by which all decisions of leading party committees were binding on the membership. "Somewhere up above, very, very high up, someone is locking somebody up somewhere, replacing somebody, throttling somebody. Someone is proclaiming himself somebody—and, as a result, on the committee's tower a flag makes its triumphant appearance bearing the inscription: 'orthodoxy, centralism, political struggle.' " Thus wrote Trotsky of the Bolshevik party in *Our Political Tasks* over ten years before the Revolution. Such a denunciation could hardly have been more strongly worded against the tsarist autocracy, and similar denunciations, in almost the same words, repeatedly flow from the pen of Trotsky to-day, no longer against the Bolshevik party under Lenin's leadership, but against the Soviet State under Stalin.

<sup>1</sup> P. Kerzhentzev, *Life of Lenin* (Co-operative Publishing Society, Moscow), p. 196.

Already, in 1918, Trotsky's view of the Revolution led him to oppose the signing of peace with Germany. But the Soviet soldiers would not fight; the Germans advanced, and only just in time did Lenin and Stalin win a majority on the central committee of the party in favour of peace at any price. And at that time Bukharin, Redek, and a number of others who have recently been tried, supported Trotsky against Lenin and Stalin. Not only did they do this but they formed their own 'Left Communist' group, accused Lenin of right-wing tendencies, and plotted with the Social Revolutionaries to overthrow the government by force and to impose a government of their own.

If, in 1917, Kamenev and Zinoviev had had their way, there would have been no Soviet Government. If, in 1918, Trotsky and Bukharin and their followers had had their way the Soviet Republic would have been annihilated by the military force of imperial Germany. I do not recall these facts from a desire to wash dirty linen in public, but for a two-fold purpose. First, to explain how it was that by 1931 in the U.S.S.R. these people were already completely discredited in the public eye. Secondly, to show that, contrary to the reports which have been circulated during the last two years that these people were responsible for the Revolution, the contrary is the truth. While they all did useful work at one time or another, at decisive moments the adoption of their policy would have meant ruin.

I want to recall one other case of bitter controversy during the early years of the Revolution to make my point clear. This was in 1921 when a discussion on the rôle of the trade unions in Soviet society was taking place. Lenin writes of Trotsky at this time :

After two plenums of the Central Committee (November 9 and December 7) which were devoted to an unprecedentedly detailed, long, and heated discussion of the original draft of Comrade Trotsky's theses and of the entire trade union policy that he advocates for the party, a member of the Central Committee, *one out*

of *nineteen*, chooses a group outside the Central Committee and advances the "collective" "work" of this group as a "platform," advising the Party congress to "choose between two trends!" . . .

Can it be denied that, even if the "new tasks and methods" were indicated by Trotsky as correctly as he has in fact indicated them incorrectly [of this later], Trotsky's approach to the question would alone have caused harm to himself, to the party, to the trade union movement, to the work of training millions of trade union members, and to the republic.<sup>1</sup>

Indeed [wrote Lenin], what is good about Trotsky? Not his theses, but in his *speeches*, . . . his *production propaganda* is undoubtedly good and useful. Had he taken a practical, "business-like" part in the work of the trade union commission, as a speaker and writer . . . Comrade Trotsky would undoubtedly have done useful work.<sup>2</sup>

Already, at this time, Lenin and the leadership of the party are finding that the professional speaker and writer when he starts producing his own theories instead of doing practical work along lines already agreed upon, may become a disruptive force. And at this time the party needed people to do concrete work, not to issue manifestoes

At one time we needed declarations, manifestoes and decrees [wrote Lenin]. We have quite enough of these. At one time we needed these things in order to show the people how and what we want to build, what new and hitherto unseen things we are striving for. But can we continue showing the people what we want to build? No. Even the simplest worker will begin to sneer at us and say: "What's the use of your keeping on showing us what you want to build? Show us that you can build. If you can't build, your way is not ours, and you can go to hell!" And he will be right.<sup>3</sup>

Now the most able speakers and writers, when in addition they have a personal longing for power, may become thorns in the flesh of any practical committee that has to undertake concrete and urgent tasks. Already in 1917, Lenin wrote in scorn of a "dozen or so spineless in-

<sup>1</sup> Lenin, *Selected Works*, Vol. ix (Lawrence & Wishart), pp. 42-45.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 269.

tellectuals", and in 1921 he points out how Trotsky's speeches and propaganda were useful, that he was an excellent speaker and writer, but that his reluctance to adopt a 'business-like' approach on a committee made him a danger even to the republic itself. In equally strong words at that time he condemned Bukharin, and forecast that the more he, "defends his deviation from Communism . . . the more deplorable will be the fruits of his obstinacy."<sup>1</sup> While these conflicts were well known to the Soviet people they were never followed closely abroad. With the result that Trotsky, Bukharin, and others lost prestige rapidly on Soviet territory, while abroad their reputations died hard.

It is frequently alleged to-day that most of the original members of the central committee of the Bolshevik party, as it was in 1917, are now dead. While a number have died natural deaths, it is a fact that a number of them have since been exiled and a certain number shot. Prior to 1917 the leadership of the Bolshevik party that operated abroad consisted mainly of propagandists, writers, and speakers. They were not the people who, at the constant risk of their liberty and of their lives, were doing the day-to-day work of organizing the workers and peasants inside Russia. Stalin was one of these latter, who only very occasionally was abroad as a delegate to a conference, and who almost the whole of his time was working inside the Russian Empire or in exile in Siberia. Stalin never was one of that group of speakers and writers who lived for long periods abroad.

Already in 1917 Lenin points out that the "spineless intellectuals" must be replaced by real revolutionaries in the leadership of the party. And later he shows that it is practical work that is now necessary, the time for writing programmes and manifestoes is over. And, as an inevitable result of this change, the intellectuals find that their dominance is on the decline, working-class Bolsheviks

<sup>1</sup> Lenin, *Selected Works*, Vol. ix (Lawrence & Wishart), p. 79.

are taking their place in leading positions. Those intellectuals who were sufficiently communist to recognize the necessity of this felt only satisfaction as the leadership of the party became more representative of the working people. But all those intellectuals, such as Trotsky in particular, who had always put personal prestige before party discipline, resented it bitterly. While such people as Voroshilov, metal-worker, Bolshevik since 1903, was elected to the central committee in 1921 as a result of his superb leadership in the civil war, and Kaganovitch, leather-worker, was elected in 1924 as a result of his outstanding organizing ability; the prestige of those rather self-centred intellectuals, who were repeatedly showing themselves to be extremely undisciplined and unreliable in their judgment, steadily declined. Bit by bit the respect for Stalin, Voroshilov, Kalinin, Kuibishev, Kirov, Ordjonikidze, Molotov, among the mass of the people grew; and the support for Trotsky, Bukharin, Kamenev, Zinoviev and Radek waned. Whilst these latter continued to be admired for their brilliant journalism, it was the former group that was respected for its sound political judgment, based on the closest analysis of the immediate situation with which the country was faced, together with an intense conviction that Lenin was right in his belief that socialism could be organized even in one country if the revolution in the West did not mature immediately.

I remember a story told me by an interpreter who had officiated at several sessions of the Communist International, of how Trotsky once made a speech in Russian and then volunteered to make his own translation into French. He spoke for twice as long to the French delegation as he did in Russian! And in *American Testament*<sup>1</sup> Joseph Freeman gives a picture of Trotsky's final appearance in the Communist International, when he had been overwhelmingly defeated within the Bolshevik party of the U.S.S.R. after months, nay, years, of heated discussion.

<sup>1</sup> Joseph Freeman, *American Testament* (Gollancz), p. 531 *et seq.*

Freeman describes how people came to hear Trotsky as if to see a great actor. Even his enemies were thrilled at the show which they were going to see. Even though the overwhelming majority were against Trotsky his brilliant oratory was a performance to which they looked forward. This was the last stand of a brilliant intellectual, an individualist to the core, a man incapable of collective and disciplined work: and a man who had been steadily playing a losing game because of his individualism, because he always approached every question from himself outwards, instead of from the masses inwards, as Stalin does.

The issue of Trotskyism can be seen in several aspects. It is the issue of a theory of revolution based on an inability to weigh up, at every stage, the exact balance of class forces, as against a theory which bases itself entirely on the systematic study, at every stage, of the concrete problems that the people have to face. It is the theory of a professional propagandist; as against the theory of those who never isolate themselves from the real problems as they actually are. It is the theory of the self-centred intellectual, with all his self-confidence and his disregard for the masses of the people, as against a theory of the working people having to solve the problems of their own salvation one by one, as they come face to face with them.

But when the professional propagandist, the self-centred intellectual, finds that his political prestige is on the decline, that he no longer commands any mass following, will he accept this position and work loyally in a minor position, possibly having to submit to the leadership of those whom he formerly opposed? Or, will he do his utmost to replace those who have taken his place in leading positions? There are many professing socialists in Britain to-day with Oxford and Cambridge degrees. How many of them would always be ready loyally to support a socialist government composed of working men and women, not one of whom was a university graduate? This

is a question' that it will be good for every intellectual to ask himself. And if he is not ready to accept such a government when socialism is achieved he may well become a Kamenev or a Bukharin.\*

So far I have dealt with what may be termed the political core of the conspiracies recently revealed in the Soviet trials, but I have only dealt with a few outstanding personalities. And it may appear that, while what I say is true of some individuals it does not cover such figures as Tukachevsky and Yagoda, men who held what appear to be leading positions in the Soviet State.

In the case of Tukachevsky, however, the argument here applies with certain adjustments. For Tukachevsky was not a working-class revolutionary but an ex-nobleman. He had been a tsarist officer; he was promoted to high positions in the Red Army for his military knowledge and ability, and not for his political judgment. And, even when Assistant Commissar for Defence, it was always a well-known fact that the Government and the Commissar for Defence, Voroshilov, determined policy; Tukachevsky never enjoyed a position of political leadership. But suppose that Tukachevsky's ambitions were political and not merely military, then surely nothing could be more galling for this ex-aristocrat, a very able man, constantly to be under the authority of ordinary working people, constantly unable to swing policy in the direction in which he would have liked to swing it. And, if in his work he came into frequent contact with German generals of his own class, is it not possible that he might consider that co-operation with them held out better prospects for the kind of career he desired than continuing loyally to support the Soviet Government?

As for Yagoda, he never pretended to be a political leader. He rose from the ranks of the G.P.U., and as has now been shown, this was partly by criminal means. He had Napoleonic ambitions of his own. He found allies in the politically disgruntled, and in others who shared his ambitions, and so, he too got drawn into the network

of conspiracy which centred on all those people who, because of their lack of mass support, at this stage could only see the possibility of achieving power through violent means. It is this factor which was the basis of unity for all the conspirators. Whether it was Kamenev or Bukharin, old oppositionists within the Bolshevik leadership, the old Ukrainian Nationalist Grinko, or the old police-spy Zelensky; whether it was the military Napoleon Tukachevsky, with his plans to co-operate with Reichswehr generals or the careerist Yagoda, all these people were united. Each and everyone of them was convinced that he could only achieve that political power which he personally desired by conspiracy against the Soviet State. On that basis a united front was formed of the most heterogeneous elements, from 'Old Bolsheviks' to Nazi and Japanese agents. They had a 'united front' against the Soviet government, whereas if they had succeeded, they later would have annihilated each other in their struggle for supremacy. But they did not succeed; their plot was nipped in the bud.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### ENEMIES OF THE PEOPLE

**T**HE line of demarcation between a discredited leader of any political movement and an enemy of that movement is a narrow one. Any leader whose own personal desire for power is stronger than his loyalty to the movement, and who is, therefore, not ready to accept democratic decision against himself, is a potential enemy of the movement which he leads. For, when beaten in democratic discussion, his desire for personal power will cause him inevitably to oppose a decision against himself; either by becoming an enemy of the movement, working from outside, or a disrupter of the movement, working from within. In Trotsky we see the enemy working from outside, in Bukharin disrupting from within. But at no stage did Trotsky or Bukharin ever resort to force when they felt they could get what they wanted by democratic means. But so soon as public opinion no longer supported them then they had to give in, or resort to violence.

In this respect the actions of Trotsky and Bukharin in relation to the U.S.S.R. are analogous to the actions of Franco in regard to Spain. The Spanish fascists did not attempt a forced seizure of power so long as there was the remotest hope of a victory at the elections. But when they saw that their prestige had so fallen that they were never again likely to win an election, then they restored to armed rebellion. But, for the Trotskyists in the U.S.S.R., as for the Francoists in Spain, the realization that they had not enough mass support to be elected to power also meant that they knew they would have still less mass support within the country for an armed seizure of power. Therefore, in both cases, unable to rely on

popular support, they were forced by circumstances to go elsewhere, to seek alliances with the most militant foreign enemies of their own country abroad. In both cases the Berlin-Rome-Tokio axis formed the centre of the external enemy. Both groups, the group of discredited politicians working for a seizure of power in the U.S.S.R., and the group of discredited property owners and fascists working for a seizure of power in Spain, found that they had the same energetic ally abroad, the Berlin-Rome-Tokio axis. Neither could seize power in isolation. Both were forced to seek foreign assistance.

Now while it is generally realized that the property owners of Spain were ready to seek armed support from fascist governments, it has been much more difficult for the public in other countries to imagine 'old Bolsheviks' doing the same thing. The analysis of the previous chapter should, however, have dispelled some of these doubts, for the practical question was not one of Bukharin and others becoming completely fascist, but of Bukharin forming a united front with the fascists in the immediate situation for a particular purpose. As Bukharin says himself in the trial, their struggle brought them "into a camp which in its views and features was very much akin to a *kulak* praetorian fascism."<sup>1</sup> And if you read the denunciations of the U.S.S.R. published by Trotsky and his followers of recent years, you find that they are almost indistinguishable, in their content, from the denunciation by Hitler and Goebbels. There is, however, this difference: whereas the Aryan Hitler denounces the "Jewish Bureaucracy" in Moscow, the Jewish Trotsky calls it the "Stalinist Bureaucracy." But when we read the actual statements made about the U.S.S.R. we find that Hitler and Trotsky even tell the same lies; for example, the legend that the death penalty for theft was introduced in the U.S.S.R. in 1935 for children of twelve years old. This legend was published by Trotsky and Hitler and their propaganda

<sup>1</sup> *Verbatim Report* (Commissariat of Justice, Moscow), p. 776.

agencies—few others, however hostile to the U.S.S.R., would contaminate themselves with such a lie.

And in his book, *The Revolution Betrayed*, Trotsky quite openly states that in his view the only salvation for the workers of the U.S.S.R. is another revolution. Further, that it is his and his followers' avowed duty to work for such a "revolution." This being the case, surely we must expect Trotsky and his followers to be working to mobilize people on Soviet territory to do everything possible to weaken the Soviet State. And in doing this are not those people meriting the fullest support of Hitler and of Japan, who have the same immediate aim as they have?

If we examine the reports of the trials we find that the kind of activities which have been carried on against the Soviet State are just those that a group of people is forced to carry on when it no longer has mass support. They did everything they could to weaken the Soviet State, including spying for foreign powers and wrecking inside the Soviet Union, plotting and carrying out terrorist acts against Soviet leaders, attempting in every way to disorganize the U.S.S.R. and to lower the morale of the people.

Sensational paragraphs and headlines have appeared in this country about the alleged 'confessions' in the Soviet court. It will be remembered that the same things were said in 1933 about the Metro-Vickers engineers, but not an atom of evidence has ever been provided, even after they returned home, to suggest that the findings of the court were anything but just. And, with regard to the more recent trials, it will be noted that not a single press correspondent who was present at the trials has suggested that they were anything but straightforward. All the doubt on the genuineness of the trials has been cast, not by the trials themselves, or those present at them, but by newspaper articles, written a thousand miles away, and specifically calculated to sow confusion in the minds of the people of other countries. I am convinced that no newspaper correspondent present at the recent trials was left

any more in doubt than Mr. A. J. Cummings was left in doubt by the Metro-Vickers Trial of 1933.

Two questions may now arise in the mind of the reader. On the one hand you may ask how it came about, if these people were so ambitious and so unreliable, that they held responsible positions for so long. If, in 1921 Bukharin admitted that he and others had known of the plot to kidnap Lenin, how was it that such people were tolerated in the highest positions in the Bolshevik party afterwards? And another question which arises is this: Can it not be said that, if these people had been more free to criticize the Soviet Government openly, they would not have resorted to conspiratorial methods? These questions will now occupy us.

Every political movement which is fighting for adherents is unable to select its members as carefully as it would like. And this is increasingly true the more a political party is based on democratic principles and works to strengthen its ties with the masses of the people. And the Russian Bolshevik party, throughout its history, was always ready to admit to membership anyone who accepted the party's programme and rules and who worked as a loyal member of the organization. Time and again, when particular members have merited expulsion, and have actually been expelled, they have later been readmitted so soon as they expressed their willingness in future to abide loyally by the decisions of the party. Such tolerance, it should be realized, is inevitable in any democratic organization, for no democratic movement can afford to exclude from its ranks people who profess to be its whole-hearted supporters.

It has been suggested that for twenty years Lenin and Stalin tolerated enemies within the party. Remember that, prior to 1917, there was a member of the Central Committee, Malinovsky, who was a tsarist spy. But so long as he acted like a good Bolshevik and hid his spying there was every reason why Lenin, Stalin and other leaders, not knowing that he was a spy, should have tolerated

and even welcomed his contribution to the work of the Central Committee. After the Revolution, time and time again, the leadership showed itself unwilling to do anything that would lead to the expulsion of people with great ability, so long as they appeared to work loyally for the party. In fact, the Bolshevik party has tolerated people whom it had every reason to consider unreliable, to a far greater extent and for a far longer time than working-class parties are accustomed to do under capitalism.

The second question which is frequently asked is whether these people, if they had enjoyed freedom of propaganda, would not have confined their activities to propaganda and not resorted to force. The answer is, I think, firstly, that freedom of propaganda in no way prevents a determined minority from resorting to force if it knows that its propaganda alone will never win it power. To take the recent example of Spain. General Franco did not organize his rebellion because the fascists were deprived of freedom of propaganda; actually, the fascists had complete freedom of propaganda until they precipitated the rebellion. The fascists started the rebellion when they realized that, whatever their propaganda, they would never again be able to win mass support against the Popular Front.

And this parallel applies equally to the U.S.S.R. The accused in the recent trials had for many years given up open anti-Government propaganda because they knew not only that they had no hope of winning mass support but that their popularity would actually decline if they came out openly as enemies of popular decisions. Therefore, their propaganda took the form of pro-Soviet and pro-Party statements, the better to get themselves trusted, to be put in positions where their conspiracy for the seizure of power could be strengthened. The issue is, therefore, not one of freedom or lack of freedom for propaganda, it is the issue of whether a particular group has, or has not, any hope of achieving power by democratic means by winning majority support through completely open and

legal activities. The questions of permitting or prohibiting propaganda is not the decisive one.

It has sometimes been argued that the expulsion of Trotsky from the party and then from the U.S.S.R. was a 'dictatorial' act by Stalin. And that the breaking up of the Trotskyist organization was a similar act of dictatorship. And yet, if we reflect a little, we see that every democratic organization takes similar steps when faced with activities which the overwhelming majority of the members consider disruptive. Just to take an example from working-class democracy, let us consider a trade union. Now in trade union, in the branches, in conferences, and in committees, there take place frequent discussions on policy. But suppose, within any union, a tendency takes shape which attacks the accepted principles of the union itself. Then, inevitably, at a certain stage, recognizing that this tendency militates against the development of the movement, some drastic decision will be taken to put an end to such activities (including propaganda) as are inconsistent with the aims of the organization.

In a trade union during a strike a decision may be made to continue the struggle till victory is secured. A minority may disagree. So long as they only express disagreement during the discussion they will probably be tolerated; but so soon as this disagreement takes the form of action the individuals concerned become branded as 'blacklegs' and forms of coercion may be used against them in order that they shall be prevented from assisting the enemy in the struggle. And once such people have been branded as blacklegs it is not likely that they will henceforth even enjoy 'freedom of speech' within the union, for they will already have become recognized as enemies of the union itself by siding with the employers against their fellow-members.

And in the U.S.S.R. there has never been any question of suppressing minorities till these minorities became a serious menace to the Republic itself because of their unscrupulous propaganda and their unscrupulous acti-

vities. Trotsky was only expelled from the U.S.S.R. after years of discussion—only after he had been utterly defeated in these discussions and could no longer command public respect. Then, faced with these facts, he resorted to organizing underground conspiratorial groups. Trotsky, in such circumstances, could certainly have been given freedom of speech. The Soviet militia could have protected Trotsky's meetings as in London the police protected those of Mosley. But in the U.S.S.R. that would have been considered undemocratic and against the will and the interests of the people. The only alternative was for the organizations of the people to suppress the opposition. This was done.

But the leaders of the opposition remained at liberty. And, just as employers in any industrial dispute will establish close contact with those workers who are weak trade unionists in order to win them as blacklegs, so too in Soviet affairs the foreign states hostile to the U.S.S.R. aimed at establishing contact, not with the strongest and most consistent revolutionaries, but with the weaklings, the waverers, with those who had never been reliable leaders from the workers' point of view. And such people, if they were disgruntled at being ousted from office, if they were determined to continue their struggle for power against a leadership which they despised, and if they knew that they had no mass support to back them up within the country, could fall an easy prey to such approaches. It is in this way and no other that socialists in the fight against tsarism became the direct allies of fascism in the fight against socialism. It is in exterminating these people that the U.S.S.R. shows a military ruthlessness, for it regards them as the advance guard of fascism in its war on Soviet independence.

A great deal has been made in the press of other countries of the number of people arrested or condemned as 'enemies of the people' in the U.S.S.R. in the past two years. I do not think, however, that a sober approach to the question leads one to feel that the numbers have been

particularly large. When, for example, the *Daily Herald* referred to the arrest of 400 'railway workers' and Sir Walter Citrine showed considerable distress at the arrest of several trade union officials, they might have told the whole story. As far as the railway workers were concerned, the *Daily Herald* did not make it clear that these were not 'workers' at all, in the sense in which we use the term here, but officials. Further, it did not mention the fact that they almost all formed part of the group who came into the U.S.S.R. from Manchuria at the time of the purchase of the Chinese Eastern Railway by the Japanese. On that railway there worked a considerable number of Russians. They were mainly people who had emigrated from Russia at the time of the Revolution and intervention. When the Japanese bought the railway they made it a condition that the U.S.S.R. should repatriate the Russians employed on it. And, of these Russians some 400 were discovered later to be working for anti-Soviet organizations abroad. If the *Daily Herald* had told the whole of this story the impression on the British reader might have been a little different.

When Sir Walter Citrine is disturbed that certain trade union officials have been arrested in the U.S.S.R., his dismay at any rate should not be due to surprise. For where, after all, would enemies of the Soviet State, working from within, place some of their people if not in the trade union movement itself? If, in Britain, the Economic League finds it to its advantage to establish close contact with certain trade union leaders, then surely, in the U.S.S.R. too, agents of Hitler and of Japan are not going to ignore the trade unions, or the Bolshevik party, or any of the important departments of State either. And when people say that this conspiracy is alarmingly widespread because it has apparently touched practically every department of Soviet life, we should not be surprised. Once such a conspiracy exists, which is now generally admitted, obviously the conspirators will try to obtain contacts in every organization.

When in 'this light we read that some thousand or so, or even two or three or four thousand people or even more, out of a total population of nearly 180 million, have been arrested and tried for various offences against the State, I do not think we should be alarmed by the figures given, particularly when the people arrested are officials. If, in the U.S.S.R. to-day, hundreds of thousands of rank-and-file workers were being arrested by the officials as is happening in fascist countries, then there might be good reason for friends of socialism to be disturbed.

In describing conditions in a village near Moscow I pointed out the kind of petty bribery and intrigue which, even to-day people who were once in the old ruling class of Russia may carry on. And just as the initiator of such moves may be a member of the old ruling class, so too there may be many instigators of ill-feeling against the Government among those smaller officials who, at one time having enjoyed positions that fully satisfied their feeling of self-importance, for some reason or other, usually through their own deficiencies, have been removed from their posts. We constantly read in the Soviet press of rank-and-file workers being promoted to be managers of factories and heads of State trusts. But for every person promoted there is some body else who is removed from a responsible position and degraded in status. For some reason our newspapers always report the degradations, but they never seem to notice the promotions.

When people are removed from their posts for inefficiency, if they are ambitious and conceited individuals who do not recognize that the fault lies in themselves, they may well put down their degradation to a bureaucratic State that cannot appreciate their genius, and may then join with other people with similar grüddges in trying to overthrow this State that degrades them from responsible jobs only to place able rank-and-filers in their place. Among such people, in Soviet officialdom, there are many possible allies for those leading oppositionists at the top.

A certain amount of surprise and even uneasiness has been caused, I think, by the comparatively large number of Jews among the leading accused in the recent trials, and also the number of important officials in the smaller republics of the Union. In certain quarters this has been interpreted as the result of a return to Russian imperialist methods, of a growth of anti-Semitism, and a persecution of the smaller nations. The obvious answer to this, of course, is that working-class Jews—for example, the Kaganovitch brothers—are being promoted at the same time as Jewish counter-revolutionaries are being shot. In the smaller republics, while a number of leaders have been arrested, new people from the ranks of these same nationalities have been elected to fill their places. But the puzzle remains why so many leaders of the small nationalities were involved in these conspiracies.

The problem, I think, becomes clear when we realize the nature of the Russian Revolution. When we appreciate that, side by side with the demands of the workers for Socialism, many middle-class representatives of the oppressed peoples—whether Jews or Georgians, Armenians or Ukrainians—were bound under the conditions of tsarist Russia to become revolutionary; just as, in India to-day, many middle-class Indians are staunch revolutionaries against British Imperialism, and may, in the circumstances, even become members of the Socialist movement. But for a middle-class person to be a socialist under capitalism and to be a loyal socialist when the working-class holds power, are two different things. Many people who will be the one with ease, will never join the latter category. And the magnitude of the number of conspirators among leaders of the oppressed peoples is, I believe, a direct reflection of the proportionately high middle-class membership in the revolutionary movements of those peoples before the Revolution. The fact that a large number of the Bolshevik intellectuals were Jews meant that when the individuals among them became anti-Soviet, it happened that a large number of them were Jews.

In this chapter and the last I have tried to show what lies behind the recent trials in the U.S.S.R. as I see them. I have tried to show that on Soviet territory people have been shot for playing a part almost exactly similar to that of Franco in Spain or the 'hooded men' in France.\* I have also shown why, in my view, even people who had been Bolsheviks for many years turned to this type of activity under existing conditions. If my interpretation is correct then the Soviet Government has saved itself from a similar fate to that of Spain and that which is threatening France, and it has strengthened itself tremendously against the forces of fascist aggression. It is, I believe, precisely because the U.S.S.R. to-day is so strong, that it has been able not only to look after its own defences but to play the active part which it has undertaken with regard to Spain and China in the present critical world situation. If the French government would shoot the hooded men instead of releasing them without trial, then French democracy would be incalculably more secure than it is to-day. But if the French government really smashed the *cagouleurs* and the powers behind them, it too, like the Government of the U.S.S.R., would be denounced in practically the whole of the British press as 'ruthless dictatorship' using 'Moscow methods' to eliminate the best elements in the French people because they happened to show tendencies to become personal rivals to the present government.

The Soviet trials cannot be understood except in the light of the past internal political history of the U.S.S.R. and of current world events. The very fact that aggressive fascism exists in the world to-day gave a hope to certain types of Soviet citizens that they would never have had in a world where peace was guaranteed. This means, among other things, that the particular problem of the U.S.S.R., a conspiracy on this scale twenty years after the Revolution, is not a problem likely to occur in other countries, on such a scale, when they too reach a socialist

\*See note, p. 229

form of government. For as socialism extends throughout the world, two things must happen: on the one hand, the middle-class itself will become more convinced that as between fascism and socialism the latter is preferable, with the result that middle-class opposition to the idea of a workers' government will tend to decline, both inside and outside working-class political organizations. And secondly, the gradual extension of socialism to other countries will make the possibility of counter-revolution based on the armies of imperialist powers ever more remote. As a result, the Soviet trials must be taken as a reflection of a very specific historical stage, when the socialist and capitalist worlds are existing side by side, and they need not necessarily be repeated in the experience of all countries in a transition from capitalism to socialism. Though, on the other hand, it would be wrong to deny the possibility of such a recurrence, as we should all realize that, in every country, the forces of socialism and democracy are likely to have to conquer not only by the ballot-box, but even after a ballot victory is won they are likely to have to face sabotage and conspiracy in most of the forms in which it has appeared in the U.S.S.R.

#### NOTE TO 1943 EDITION

The author was one of the first British writers to point out the parallel between the anti-Soviet conspiracies and what was occurring in Spain and the rest of Europe.

This chapter was written in 1938. On June 26, 1941, the London *Daily Telegraph* wrote: "During and after the purge and executions of 1937 it was obvious to everyone living in Russia that a serious situation had arisen. But, looking back to-day one must admit the efficiency of the OGPU. Russia's secret police were the first to discover the potential menace of the Fifth Column and the danger presented by a growing Quisling party which was keeping in close touch with Germany."

Similarly, the American ex-ambassador to the U.S.S.R., Joseph Davies, wrote in 1941: "It was just three days after Hitler had invaded Russia. Someone in the audience asked: 'What about Fifth Columnists in Russia?' Off the anvil, I said. 'There aren't any, they shot them.' . . . None of us in Russia in 1937 and 1938 were thinking in terms of 'Fifth Column' activities..... In my own case I should have known better." (*Mission to Moscow* Gollancz, pp. 179-81).

## CHAPTER XIX

### "THE DISILLUSIONED"

SINCE I returned from Moscow in the middle of 1936 there have appeared a number of very critical books on the U.S.S.R., many of which profess to be by people who became disillusioned by life in the Soviet Union, having previously been staunch Communists. The books of Andrew Smith, Fred Beal and Eugene Lyons all fall into this category. Now I do not want to cast unfair aspersions on the sincerity of these people, but I am convinced from reading their books that they are *either* insincere, *or* that they went to the U.S.S.R. with a wholly unrealistic approach to what they were going to see. In the case of Andrew Smith, who claims to have been a Communist for years and to have gone to the U.S.S.R. simply out of sheer enthusiasm, the fact is that he only insisted on going to the Soviet Union when he had been discharged from his job as secretary of the Slovak Workers' Society in America for inefficiency and uncomradely behaviour. Apparently he had repeatedly been removed from posts for incompetence, and the U.S.S.R. was a solution to his own economic problems. Similarly, a reading of Fred Beal's account of how he went to the U.S.S.R. against the instructions of the Communist party of which he was a member, shows that it was his own personal caprice and not any firm political conviction that took him there.

And these three writers in opening their books each display a fantastic approach to the country that they were visiting. In 1930 travelling to the Soviet frontier with a group of American workers Andrew Smith adopted the rôle of adviser. Some members of the group wished

to make purchases in London, Copenhagen, and Helsingfors. Smith "urged them not to buy in a capitalistic country but to wait until they got to the Soviet Union, where they could buy more cheaply."<sup>1</sup> "Every time I saw the hammer and sickle floating in the breeze I felt a lump in my throat,"<sup>2</sup> he says. Now Smith had already been to the U.S.S.R. as a delegate. And in 1930 no person anywhere in the world believed that prices were lower in the U.S.S.R. than elsewhere, even if they had not, as Smith had, been there personally. It is, therefore, hard to believe that Smith really went to the U.S.S.R. believing that prices were lower there than elsewhere, and the "lump in the throat" at the hammer and sickle must also be taken with a grain of salt. The whole book is written to reveal the smashing of Smith's 'illusions' by his experiences. I personally cannot believe that he was really so ill-informed or emotional about the U.S.S.R. before he went there as he makes out any more than I can believe a great deal of what he says afterwards.

On her husband's own admission Mrs. Smith showed an extraordinary cynicism immediately after their arrival on Soviet territory. At the frontier station they did not like the food which was provided. "Andrew," says Mrs. Smith, "why don't you eat? You are in the workers' paradise."<sup>3</sup> Now I have personally met many visitors to the U.S.S.R. who were disappointed in this or that feature of Soviet life, but whenever I met someone who within a few hours of entering the U.S.S.R. was making sarcastic remarks about the 'workers' paradise' I knew that that person was not interested in getting at the truth. Such phrases as this did not reveal an objective attitude, or even that of the enthusiast, but that of the cynical opponent.

And when Smith tells us that when "I was in the Hotel

<sup>1</sup> Andrew Smith, *I was a Soviet Worker* (Robert Hale), p. 27.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

Europe with the delegation the sheets were changed daily”<sup>1</sup> just in order to point out that on his second visit the sheets were not changed daily, I find myself becoming still more incredulous. The very idea that in any Soviet hotel in 1930 bed-linen was changed daily is so completely fantastic that I am amazed that Smith has the audacity to tell such a story. Yet he tells it in order to demonstrate that the delegates enjoyed preferential treatment. Having spent a good deal of time with foreign worker delegates in Moscow I know that the story about their bed-linen being changed daily in order to give a good impression is absurd. And so with the rest of Andrew Smith’s stories of incidents that, bit by bit we are told, led to such disillusion that, on emerging into fascist Poland, “it was as if we had suddenly been released from some dark, terrifying jail into the bright golden sunshine.”<sup>2</sup> Just tell that to the workers of Poland!

Fred Beal is just as unrealistic as Smith on approaching Soviet territory. “As each day brought us nearer and nearer the promised land,” he writes, “our spirits rose to a higher pitch. And when our boat steamed past the historic Kronstadt Fortress we were almost hysterical.”<sup>3</sup> And Eugene Lyons, the hard-boiled, experienced journalist, found that the red stars “seemed to glow on the peaked caps of the Red soldiers with an inner light of their own, in the deepening twilight of our railroad coach. They shed an aura of intimacy and authenticated, in the mysterious language of symbols, the revolution and everything it stood for in our minds. After a lifetime in which established authority is synonymous with reaction and exploitation, the flesh-and-blood vision of a communist soldier or a communist policeman verges on the miraculous.”<sup>4</sup> Now either this story is just so much ballyhoo, in order

<sup>1</sup> Andrew Smith, *I was a Soviet Worker* (Robert Hale), p. 31.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 286.

<sup>3</sup> F. Beal, *Work from Nowhere* (Robert Hale), p. 187.

<sup>4</sup> Lyons, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

completely to mislead the reader as to the real feelings of Lyons when he entered Soviet territory, or it is genuine, in which case we may as well recognize that Lyons was such an emotional creature that he should certainly not have left his own United States. For the drop to earth from the "mystic aura" of red stars to the realm of ration-cards and *Torgsin* was obviously too much for anyone with such feelings. Yet, it was well known at that time that the U.S.S.R. was a land of ration-cards, and nobody who went to the Soviet Union between 1928 and 1932 in that naïve emotional state of mind—an almost revivalist spirit, we may say—could possibly have survived without suffering the most bitter disillusion. Then, with the bad features of the Soviet system portrayed with that same utter lack of balance that was first displayed in describing the effect of the red stars on the red army caps, a book like *Assignment in Utopia* was inevitable.

So far I have referred to three "disillusioned communists" or communist sympathizers who, in the years 1928 to 1930, went to the U.S.S.R. from the U.S.A. to live for some time. These, however, are not the only kind of disillusioned commentators to enjoy considerable publicity of recent years. Of celebrities, the most outstanding case of disillusion is that of the great French writer André Gide, who for three years "declared my admiration, my love, for the U.S.S.R." without going there. Then, on actually visiting the Soviet Union, his disappointment was rather like that of a man, who has fallen in love through letters and photographs arising from an advertisement in an 'agony' column, and then finds on marriage that the lady was not up to the standard he had expected.

The essence, I think, of André Gide's dissatisfaction with the U.S.S.R. lies in this: the U.S.S.R. is not the kind of country in which Gide could be really happy, because it is run for the improvement of the material and cultural conditions of the vast mass of ordinary people, it is not a world for intellectual epicureans. When Gide

bitterly complains that "what is delicious is swamped by what is common, that is, by what is most abundant,"<sup>1</sup> he ignores the fact that, for the mass of working people in every country of the world, including Britain, France, and the U.S.A., the main problem to-day is to be guaranteed *abundance*. The pursuit of the delicious is only possible when abundance is guaranteed. To André Gide, never having lacked abundance, the pursuit of the delicious has been the occupation of a lifetime. When the working people in the world have also achieved abundance they too will become mainly interested, in the pursuit of the delicious.

And yet, at the same time as he complains we find Gide going "into wholehearted ecstasies over the dining-hall, the workmen's club, their lodgings, and all things that have been done for their comfort, their instruction and their pleasure."<sup>2</sup> And when we read of "a little outdoor theatre, the auditorium of which is packed with some five hundred spectators, listening in religious silence to an actor who is reciting Pushkin"<sup>3</sup> one may well ask whether, in the cultural sphere at any rate, something of the delicious is not after all reaching the masses of the people for the first time!

When Gide complains of the lack of the 'delicious' in the U.S.S.R. I am reminded of a story I heard some time ago of a certain member of the Fabian Society who claimed to be a life-long socialist. On one occasion, in the course of a discussion, an acquaintance was arguing that, however peacefully a socialist government might be elected the transition to socialism even in Britain was bound to meet with difficulties during the period of change. People would have to go without luxuries, like grapefruit for breakfast in the morning. "Oh, but I don't want socialism if it means that I've got to go without my

<sup>1</sup> Gide, op. cit., p. 37.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

grape-fruit," said the Fabian !

But particularly was André Gide upset by what appeared to him to be a lack of freedom in the Soviet Union. "When the revolution is triumphant, installed and established, art runs a terrible danger, a danger almost as great as under the worst fascist oppression—the danger of orthodoxy."<sup>1</sup> And, to bear this out, he tells about Artist X., with whom he spent some time, who said : "In the days of my youth . . . we were recommended certain books and advised against others ; and naturally it was to the latter that we were drawn. The great difference to-day is that the young people read only what they are recommended to read, and have no desire to read anything else."<sup>2</sup> This statement, I think, expresses the whole of Gide's view of 'freedom' in the U.S.S.R., but it is, in my view, an answer to, not a confirmation of, his own criticism.

How does it come about that under tsarism young people did not read the recommended books, whereas now they do, read them and nothing else ? Has the youth of Russia degenerated ? Or, have the new authorities, created by the Revolution, so organized life that the young people harbour no longer that distrust towards authority which they felt under the old system, and which so many representatives of British youth feel to-day with regard to existing conventions, traditions and authority in this country ? My personal view is that these questions raise the vital point. In the U.S.S.R. to-day, with a State authority that offers youth an opportunity for the completest individual development, there is not that distrust of authority which exists in a society torn by internal conflicts. Agreement between the People and Authority, based on community of interests, results in the 'conformism' of which Gide complains.

In the end it all boils down to this : In the capitalist world to-day, with illusions shattered by the last war and

<sup>1</sup> Gide, *op. cit.*, p. 81.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78.

fear of the next, there is a growing distrust of all existing authority. Non-conformity spreads in such a setting, and many non-conformists begin to value this non-conformity in itself as being desirable. The fact that capitalist traditions and conventions are becoming obsolete leads certain people, particularly among the intellectuals, to look upon all tradition and convention as bad. In this category we must place André Gide.

But no society has ever progressed without working out its own traditions and conventions. And in the U.S.S.R. to-day there is not the slightest doubt that new standards and new conventions are taking the place of the old ones. The U.S.S.R. is not and cannot be a conventionless society, it must inevitably become a society in which conventions are determined by the whole working population of the country, and these conventions will develop according to the material and cultural standards of the people.

This shows itself not only in everyday life but in art and letters. Gide, in his book, refers with some justifiable pride to the fact that in his own writings he struck out on an independent line :

I cared very little about applause ; i could have got it from that bourgeois class from which I myself came, and to which, it is true, I still belonged, but which I heartily despised, precisely because I knew it so well, and against which all that was best in me rebelled. . . . And I had the painful but exhilarating impression of speaking in the desert. Speaking in the desert is very satisfactory ; there is no risk of an echo distorting the sound of your voice ; there is no need to be concerned about the impression your words may make and there is nothing to influence them but a need for sincerity.<sup>1</sup>

In this respect, happening to have a private income and, therefore, not being dependent for a living on his work, Gide was free to write as he pleased, and "in the course of twenty years (1897-1917) there were exactly five hundred purchasers."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Gide, op. cit., p. 96.

<sup>2</sup> Gide, op. cit., p. 96.

Such a freedom as this was enjoyed by Gide under capitalism because he possessed an unearned income. In the U.S.S.R. he could certainly not have enjoyed such freedom, because he would not have been allowed to live without working for a living. And, in the U.S.S.R. writers have to be responsible not only to themselves but to the community. How can a State publishing house to-day, faced with the demands of millions of readers for millions of new issues of the world's greatest classics, and for modern books which will appeal to millions of Soviet workers and peasants, bring out editions of books that can only command the interest of five hundred readers? In the U.S.S.R. to-day it is required of an author that he should write for the people. And Soviet writers actually discuss their books with workers in factory-clubs before publishing them. In this way literature belongs to the people; it is a democratic literature. But Gide's conception of his work was not a democratic one. A voice "crying in the wilderness" may satisfy the voice; but the U.S.S.R. is not a wilderness, and demands that its voices shall say something with a message to the mass of its inhabitants.

It is, I believe, this fundamental fact, that in the U.S.S.R. more than in any other country of the world the writer and artist are called upon to be active citizens, and not to isolate themselves from society, that caused Gide such disappointment. In rejecting his own class and its standards, Gide, in fact, rejected all social standards. He did not appreciate the fact that the only *practical* alternative before him was that much vaster class—the people who work. And in the U.S.S.R. he found these people too interested in providing material abundance at the moment to worry about all those delicious things which he personally finds to be necessities of life. And when he came face to face with a society in which authors are literally expected to take seriously the comments of ordinary working people on their writings—together with everything else which goes with such a society—Gide

exclaimed, alas ! that he doubted whether "in any other country of the world, even Hitler's Germany, thought be less free, more bowed down, more fearful [terrorized], more vassalized."<sup>1</sup>

And from a certain standpoint this statement by Gide as a direct reflection of his own personal position is correct. In Nazi Germany to-day there would be nothing to prevent Gide—if he had an unearned income—from writing aesthetic essays for small groups of adorers ; so long as he did not tread on the toes of the Nazi authorities. But in the U.S.S.R. Gide would have to work for a living. And he could only be a professional writer if he wrote the kind of thing that Soviet citizens demand. Yes, as compared with the non-popular writer under capitalism who happens to have private means, the non-popular writer in the U.S.S.R. is unfree. But against this we must set the fact that millions of Soviet citizens to-day are reading for the first time the world's greatest classics. They are also reading new books by Soviet authors, and their growing knowledge of the classics is causing them to demand an ever better standard from their own writers. Young Soviet citizens, born of working-class families, are having opportunities in their 'wall-newspapers' and evening classes to express themselves in writing. And young people are growing up whose literary genius has ample opportunity to develop, even though they and their families have no financial means other than what they earn by their work. This is the great gain won by the masses at the expense of those who, under capitalism, with private means, can develop a non-popular literature, without any sense of social responsibility whatever, with "no need to be concerned about the impression your words may make."

The reader may feel that, in my desire to expose the attitude behind the disillusionment of André Gide, I am evading the basic question so often raised on this matter : What is the U.S.S.R. doing to-day in the field of art and

<sup>1</sup> Gide, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

architecture, literature and music? Has it justified itself in these fields or not? I answer: "Yes, it has." What it has done is to place at the disposal of the people on a greater scale than ever before the world's greatest artistic works. Secondly, it has given to the people a greater opportunity than ever before to develop their own creative capacities, and, when developed, to use them productively. The Soviet record for winning prizes at international musical festivals and contests proves this. I personally am convinced that these two tendencies are the guarantee that the Soviet system will produce the greatest crop of artists that the world has ever known.

Besides books by those who profess to have been disillusioned by their visits to the U.S.S.R. of recent years, a number of other books have appeared recently which, at first sight, give the same impression. For example, we have the case of Sir Walter Citrine who, because he is a trade union leader, is generally assumed to be a socialist; though, as a holder of a knighthood, there is equal reason to suppose that he is not. And, in his everyday work, it is well known that he is much more concerned with opposition to the Communist party than to the policy of the National Government. When such a person, who is after all no fool, goes to the U.S.S.R., we must not expect an unbiased description of what he sees. For he must realize, perfectly correctly, that anything he says in favour of the Soviet Union is bound to react, indirectly, in favour of the Communist party of our own country. Citrine at any rate did not go to the U.S.S.R. with illusions, and on returning he did his utmost to present the U.S.S.R. in the worst possible light.

Any illusions which the present reader may have as to the impartiality of Sir Walter will be dispelled by the following quotation taken at random from his book, *I Search for Truth in Russia*: "I could see the outside lavatories. Nearby several pigsties were built into the gable-end of the house. Whether these had been put there by the tenants or not, I do not know, but the pigs

were having a fine old time.”<sup>1</sup> Of course, in England too, we can see outside lavatories within sight of pigsties, and this has nothing whatever to do with whether the pigs are having a good time or not. But the way in which Sir Walter relates the incident certainly smashes any illusion that anyone may have had as to his impartiality, or even his desire to give a fair picture of the Soviet Union.

More sensational is a recent book by Ivan Solonevich, a born Russian, who only recently escaped from a Soviet labour camp. I gather that, for some reason or other, certain people are inclined to take this book as more authentic than many others, I suppose because the author's father “was the son of a peasant”<sup>2</sup> and the author himself had never been a millionaire before the Revolution. But this does not mean that he was ever in favour of the Revolution. On the contrary, he remained in the U.S.S.R. only because, “when the White Russian army evacuated from Odessa, I was laid up with typhus.”<sup>3</sup> Although Solonevich was not himself a rich man, he was apparently a great friend of a Mrs. E., . . . a member of a rich and well-known Polish family,”<sup>4</sup> and “Freddie, . . . one of our Moscow acquaintances, belonging to a foreign legation.”<sup>5</sup> Therefore, it is unreasonable to regard Solonevich as being anything but a typical Russian “White” whose sole misfortune was that, instead of being able to leave the country with the other *émigrés*, he missed his chance. His life in the U.S.S.R. seems to have been devoted to trying to devise means for going abroad, and his book is a description of what happened after he and his family were arrested in a train, armed with revolvers, on their way to the frontier.

When people in the U.S.S.R. have friends who are

<sup>1</sup> Citrine, *op. cit.*, p. 231.

<sup>2</sup> I. Solonevich, *Russia in Chains* (Williams & Norgate), p. 6.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 85.

members of rich Polish families and officials in foreign legations and are caught trying secretly to cross the frontier, armed with revolvers, they are not unreasonably suspected of being enemies of the Soviet State. And Solonevich makes no bones about his hostility to the Soviets. "From 1918 onwards there began for us Soviet life in the strict sense of the word: hunger, evacuation, arrests, homelessness, and so forth."<sup>1</sup> To a person who is so completely out of touch with the way the Revolution affected the working masses of the people, and who personally suffered from the Revolution, the U.S.S.R. could never be anything but a sort of glorified prison. And in describing the labour camps of the U.S.S.R. Solonevich calmly states that "the Concentration Camp in my view, differs little from the so-called freedom of the Russian world outside."<sup>2</sup> But to the person who obtained freedom through the Russian Revolution this can only be read to mean that the Soviet labour camp provides a freedom for its inmates not usual in our own prisons in this country.

And, indeed, from beginning to end, if we discount his own particular bias, Solonevich portrays a system of criminal correction in which solitary confinement is only used in exceptional cases of misdemeanour and where the prisoners are almost entirely self-governing. The only cases of violence that he personally describes are between prisoners themselves. If we consider the Soviet play *Aristocrats*, which deals with labour camps, and imagine one of the characters being determined, at all costs, to continue his opposition to the Soviet system and prison discipline, I think we can see him writing just the kind of book that Solonevich has written. Every adverse incident is magnified, officials are all portrayed as villains—while Solonevich neglects each time to point out that these officials are themselves fellow-prisoners!—and life outside the labour camp is presented as a sea of corruption in

<sup>1</sup> I. Solonevich, *Russia in Chains* (Williams & Norgate), p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

which the arch-villain is the 'Active.' The 'Active' here described, I should explain, is all those active members of Soviet society who play their part in the running of the trade unions and other organizations. In being a trade union organizer I was part of the 'active;' so were the trade union committee that I described who distributed passes to a rest-home in a way not entirely in the interests of the members. If I take this incident, universalize it, and deny the existence of any honest officials in the U.S.S.R. then I present you with the picture painted by Mr. Solonevich. Obviously, such a picture is untrue. According to Solonevich, so great is the internal disintegration of the Soviet Union that there has been "a fall in industrial and agricultural production" since 1934.<sup>1</sup> Mr. Solonevich is the only person that knows about this fall, and when I was back in the U.S.S.R. last summer everyone was satisfied that the level of production was steadily rising, as it had been doing when I left. It seems that people who are once opposed to the Soviet system start to create a fantasy world of their own, in which everything is permanently going from bad to worse on Soviet territory. Mr. Solonevich does not explain how, if the country is in the appalling condition that he paints, it has ever been able to survive. Nor does he explain how it is that the standard of life is steadily rising. He simply denies these facts. Such a person is no more truthful because he has been in the U.S.S.R. till 1934 than any other Russian *émigré* whose "present occupation" consists in his "anti-Soviet activities" as Mr. Solonevich puts it. Whether Mr. Solonevich escaped in 1918 or in 1938 I do not think his "impression" would be any different from what they are.

There is one test which readers should apply to every book about the U.S.S.R. First, if it is by someone who lived in Russia before the Revolution it is to ask: How did the Revolution affect them personally? And if they were benefited by the Revolution at the first, it is always

<sup>1</sup> I. Solonevich, *Russia in Chains* (Williams & Norgate), p. 5.

worth while asking whether, since then, they have suffered some serious personal set back? Secondly, if an author went to the U.S.S.R. from outside, then let us ask: Had he any particular reason for disliking Communism, and, therefore, for deliberately portraying Soviet conditions unfavourably? Did he know anything about what conditions were like under tsarism? And, finally, always be suspicious of a critic who writes of nothing but bad features of the Soviet system, and who never stops to ask: What were things like before?—Why are they as they are?—What is being done to improve them? I personally believe that if these last three questions are asked with regard to every criticism that is made to-day of the U.S.S.R. and is based on fact, we shall find that most of the criticisms melt away. We shall observe that the very faults that are being criticized as fundamental to the system are things that the Soviet people, under the very noses of our critics, are doing their utmost to eliminate. The U.S.S.R. has had socialism in operation for five whole years in town and country. The fact that features of tsarist Russia still survive is not the surprising fact, the miracle is that socialism has been established, and can now go ahead from year to year. This, at any rate, is how I see it, having gone to the U.S.S.R. with no anti-Communist axe to grind, and no pro-Soviet illusions.

## CHAPTER XX

### CONCLUSION: WHY I CAME BACK

**I**N summing up the achievements and shortcomings of the U.S.S.R. to date we must always bear in mind the fact that the Soviet Union has never yet enjoyed that peace and security from the danger of further attack for which it has always hoped. The world is still divided to-day, as in 1917, into an imperialist and a socialist camp, though the emphasis has shifted at the present time to an immediate cleavage between fascism and democracy. In such a world the danger of a further assault on the Soviet frontiers is an immediate one, the operation of foreign agents on Soviet territory is an undisputed fact, and Soviet policy is, therefore, not that of a socialist government in conditions of peace and security but of one which knows that it is surrounded by enemies, and ready to defend its frontiers in a world already at war.

But in spite of its isolation the U.S.S.R. has succeeded in setting the world an example in a number of respects. First of all, it has succeeded in establishing a social system in which inequalities due to sex, race, and nationality have been eliminated. It has set up a society in which citizens are judged by their work—all must work, there is work for all. Each person may develop his or her capacities to the full through free education, and having developed them there is an opportunity to use them. Citizens, according to their ability, rise to the highest posts in the country. The Supreme Council of the U.S.S.R. consists of individuals elected for their merits at *work*. No Soviet 'Member of Parliament' has fought an election on his wife's inherited wealth. There is no House of Lords in which there is only a full attendance when a progressive law, in the

interests of the working people, has to be obstructed. In the U.S.S.R. people do not see their portraits in the press for going to Ascot or Lords, but for flying across the North Pole, growing sugar-beet, or mining coal.

Secondly, the Soviet Union has succeeded in so organizing the economic life of the country that it is working according to plan to meet the needs of the community. This has been made possible by turning the land and the means of production into public property. It has resulted in the abolition of unemployment and the provision of a steadily rising standard of life to the whole people through constantly rising wages and falling prices. In doing this the Soviet Union has accomplished what capitalism has never at any time been able to do.

Thirdly, it has been possible in the Soviet Union, in spite of the appalling backwardness of the tsarist Russia from which it emerged, to provide both leisure and security to the working people. The average working day in Soviet industry is under seven hours, the maximum is eight hours. A minimum of two weeks' paid holiday a year is guaranteed to all workers. Free medical, hospital and maternity care are available to all who need them and pay is given when a worker is off work due to illness. In the case of pregnant women, four whole months off work on full pay are guaranteed by law.

Fourthly, the U.S.S.R. has been able to provide freedom for the working population actively to participate in the running of their own affairs, whether it is a case of the factory where they work, or the block of flats where they live. Criticism by those who work of their fellow-workers and of those in authority over them is a fundamental part of Soviet life to-day. This freedom to criticize those in positions of authority, whether practised by students in a university or workers in a factory, gives a scope to personal initiative and expression that results in the fullest development of the personality of the ordinary Soviet citizen.

Fifthly, in the international field, a community has been organized on one-sixth of the earth's surface in

which no man, woman, or child gains a penny from arms manufacture, and in which no working man or woman depends on arms production as the only possible source of employment. This vast country has no need for outside territory. "Ah," it has been said, "but Russia has all the natural resources necessary to a self-contained country; it is the size of the U.S.S.R., not its economic and social system, that explains the fact that it does not need more territory." Yes, but did the tsarist government, which had even more territory at its disposal, reason like that? No, as an imperialist government it was constantly trying to extend the boundaries of the Russian Empire, just as the British and German, Japanese and French imperialist governments have wanted more territory, and gone to war to get it. It is the new type of government in the U.S.S.R. that does not want more territory, because it is organized on new lines; the size of the country in which this government has been set up is not the decisive factor.

I have here summed up what, as a result of my own experience, I believe to be the undisputed assets of the Soviet system to date. These assets may be ignored—it will be noticed that critics of the U.S.S.R. rarely refer to them but they are the basic gains of the Russian Revolution. For these gains alone, I think the new system is worth defending from those who wish it ill; and many will think that for these things alone the same system is worth fighting for in other parts of the world.

What, then, are the main shortcomings of the Soviet system up to the present time? In what ways does the U.S.S.R. lag behind the rest of the world? In answer to this question I must quite frankly say that, in my view, taking area for area, and taking similar populations, I cannot see that the U.S.S.R. is in any but a leading position in the world to-day in all respects. We may find that lavatories are backward compared with England, though not with France; that the people are worse shod than in Britain, but better shod than in the British Empire as a

whole; that housing per head is worse than in this country, but certainly not worse than the average for the whole of Europe, excluding Soviet territory. And, in making comparisons, I have already shown how completely unscientific it is to use England alone as a measuring rod. If we do this, however, we must recognize that in the five respects which I have mentioned, the U.S.S.R. has even surpassed this country.

•In the course of writing this book I received a letter in which there appeared the following paragraph:

I had a long talk over the week-end with a man extremely interested in Russia, and well-disposed towards it. His questions were: "When shall we be able to cease making excuses for Russia—valid excuses, but still excuses? When will the experiment be able to stand on its own merit and not need internal propaganda which gives Russians a somewhat distorted view of their own country and of others? When will the Soviet Government be able to let its citizens go abroad freely, without fear of comparison with conditions in capitalist countries? How soon will it be before the essential worth of the régime in Russia will be so obvious to Russians that there will be no more question of sabotage, Trotskyism, or the necessity for secret police? In fact, when will Russia be like Cæsar's wife?"

This letter so admirably sums up all that is usually called 'negative' in the Soviet balance-sheet that I shall now take it as my text, for it expresses a very common view, particularly among the British middle class, yet a point of view which is seriously out of touch with the reality of the situation. We have to realize that the U.S.S.R. cannot and will never be "like Cæsar's wife"—above suspicion, to that section at least of world opinion which, on Soviet territory, has been deprived of all power. To big financiers and businessmen, to landlords and private newspaper owners, the U.S.S.R. is anathema, and must always be anathema, for it has succeeded without their co-operation, it has dispensed with their services, it has deprived them of the right to live on rents and profits and to rule the country. To these people, the *greater* the progress of the U.S.S.R. the *less* will they like it. There-

fore, they will continue their policy of trying to weaken the U.S.S.R., of trying to discredit it, and, if possible to annihilate it.

And this applies, not only to the big financiers and businessmen, landlords, and millionaire newspaper proprietors, it equally applies to all those within the progressive and democratic movements who, even to-day, prefer to wage war against Communists because they feel that this is in their own personal interests than to work together with them. In 1936 Sir Walter Citrine could find pigs and lavatories sufficiently near together to make the comments quoted in the last chapter. This was 1936. But by 1946, whatever the rate of progress in the U.S.S.R. may be, nobody can guarantee that nowhere will pigs and lavatories be within full view of each other, as they are on many English farms to-day! And if this is so, then Sir Walter Citrine in 1946 can write these same phrases, with the same aim of discrediting the U.S.S.R. Again, Sir Walter saw workers demolishing old buildings in Moscow. "We saw men and women *crawling over masses of debris* in the work of demolition and street-widening."<sup>1</sup> But in 1946 old buildings will still be having to be demolished to make way for new, and in 1956 also! So long as every process is still not completely mechanized, and people still work on the demolition of buildings, men like Sir Walter will be able to write about "crawling over masses of debris." Therefore, let us fully recognize that whatever the progress of the U.S.S.R., there will be always people who will try to discredit it, so long as capitalism lasts in the rest of the world.

And, as is shown by these examples, there will always be something or other which can be presented in a light hostile to the U.S.S.R. by those who are so inclined. Therefore, it will always be necessary to reply to such criticisms, so long as the world is divided into two fundamentally opposed systems. "

<sup>1</sup> Citrine, op. cit., p. 67. [My *italics*]

It is not in my view the citizens of the U.S.S.R. who receive a "somewhat distorted view." There is undoubtedly partisanship on both sides; but as I have shown in an earlier chapter, the distortion tends to be greater in capitalist countries than in the U.S.S.R. I can personally trust the Soviet press to give a far more thorough and accurate description of world affairs than I can trust the British press to give a thorough and accurate survey of affairs in the U.S.S.R. But so long as the two systems exist side by side there will not be impartial reporting; all reporting will take place with a view to strengthening the system on whose behalf the reporter is working.

When it is asked, "When will the Soviet Government be able to let its citizens go abroad freely?" the first answer, of course, is "when this can no longer have the effect of releasing someone who is more or less harmless on Soviet territory to become an active ally of the enemies of the U.S.S.R. in another country." The Soviet Government is no more interested in sending recruits out of the country to join the White Guards in Berlin or Tokio to-day than it was in 1918, and the case of Solonevich proves that there are still quite a number of that type of persons alive even to-day on Soviet territory. But when it is assumed that the Soviet Government alone is responsible for the small number of its citizens who travel abroad, this is incorrect. Readers may not realize that a Soviet official, coming to do his regular job in a Soviet office in London, is frequently kept three months waiting for a *visa* before being allowed to enter. It is also not always realized that every Soviet citizen in a capitalist country is liable to be made a cause for a diplomatic incident, and is thus a serious liability on the Soviet State. Therefore, the Soviet Government has every reason in the existing state of armed neutrality not to grant *visas* to its citizens unless their travels abroad are of some social use. Finally, from the Soviet point of view it should be mentioned that, since there is complete State control of transactions in foreign currency, every citizen who goes abroad is a direct

burden on the State; he requires foreign currency which would otherwise be used for importing things of social utility. The Soviet Government, therefore, does not allow its citizens to travel abroad unless the money spent on them brings in a return as great as would be obtained from using it in other ways for importing goods or services of use to the Republic. As the ordinary workers and peasants never did travel abroad much anyway, this prohibition is no restriction on their freedom.

Only when we see the world as being divided into two systems, socialism and capitalism; and only when we realize the tremendous obstacles placed in the way of Soviet citizens going abroad by the capitalist states themselves, can we appreciate that such a problem, like that of propaganda, is a reciprocal one. What the U.S.S.R. does to-day when surrounded by a capitalist world has no connection whatever with what it might do if it were not surrounded in this way. In my view, the demands made by many liberals who are friendly critics of the U.S.S.R. are demands which the U.S.S.R. itself would fulfil immediately if it were no longer threatened by the states of which those liberal critics are themselves responsible citizens.

Finally, when will the U.S.S.R. be such a land of milk and honey that there will be no more question of sabotage, Trotskyism, or the necessity for secret police? And the answer, again, as in the case of the previous two questions is: Never, so long as the world is divided into the U.S.S.R. and capitalist states. To ask that there should no longer be sabotage, or the necessity for secret police, is to ask that there should not be anyone on Soviet territory working in the interests of states whose aim is to wipe out the Soviet Union. Theoretically, we might assume such a tremendous internal progress that no further cause of human disgruntlement existed on Soviet territory; and such a sealing of the frontiers that no foreign agent could ever again enter the U.S.S.R. Under such conditions, and such conditions only, would all danger of

sabotage and espionage be eliminated. But in practice, whatever the living conditions of the people in the U.S.S.R. may be, the objective existence of states hostile to the U.S.S.R. makes espionage and sabotage inevitable, and the Soviet secret service, therefore, a necessity.

As far as concerns the possibility of such enemies finding allies on Soviet territory itself and among the ranks of Soviet citizens, every rise in the material and cultural level of the people lessens the objective causes that give rise to discontent and diminishes still further any possibility of *mass* opposition to the Soviet Government. But this is not at all true of the discontent of people who still to-day, and in the future, are not concerned with the material and cultural welfare of the masses but with power for themselves. An ex-landlord and his son, a one-time factory owner and his descendants, a one-time *kulak* and his children, a political leader who has become discredited, a factory manager who has been removed from his post and does not accept this as just but puts it down to an unjust bureaucracy, a collective farm president who has been replaced by an abler and younger man and who harbours a grievance as a result—all these types of people exist in the U.S.S.R. to-day; they will exist for a very long period of years to come, and everyone of them is a possible ally for a foreign power in certain circumstances, if his animosity turns against the Soviet State to such an extent that he will be ready to work by all means for its overthrow.

Until every possible cause of human disgruntlement has been removed on Soviet soil, an achievement which will not be fulfilled this side of the Millennium (or, to put it materialistically, the highest stage of Communist society), there will be human grievances. And of the citizens with grievances it is inevitable that some, at least, will turn their rancour against the State itself. And, so long as, across the frontiers, there are armies preparing to march against the U.S.S.R., some of these disgruntled citizens will have a hope for revenge against the State which, they

feel, has done them an injustice; a hope of achieving a power that now is beyond their reach. And of these people a certain proportion will always be ready to turn their thoughts into actions and to work for the weakening of the Soviet system. Therefore, an imperfect state of society and of human nature, coupled with the encirclement of the U.S.S.R. by hostile states, is the absolute guarantee that sabotage and espionage will continue in the future.

Only when the U.S.S.R. no longer has external enemies will internal enemies no longer have hope. In those days when the U.S.S.R. has no longer to defend itself from an attack from outside, people with grievances within the country—and all causes of human disgruntlement even then are not likely to have been completely wiped out—will have not the slightest hope of finding allies against the State. Under such conditions sabotage would promise no hope whatever to the *saboteur*; and there would be no foreign power for whom espionage would be useful. Only under these conditions, conditions approaching to those of world socialism, can we expect sabotage and espionage to be eliminated completely.

Therefore, on every point in my friend's letter my answer can be summed up in the words of the first Constitution of the U.S.S.R. which was adopted in 1924 when the various Soviet Republics formed their Union: "Since the formation of the Soviet Republics the countries of the world have split into two camps, the camp of Capitalism and the camp of Socialism."

In answer to my friend's final point then, as to when the new system "will be able to stand on its merits," my answer is: It can stand on its own merits to-day before the vast masses of the labouring people of all countries. But never will it stand on its merits before the millionaire financiers, landlords, and businessmen who rule these other countries. And for this reason the people of other countries will never be fully informed of the successes of the Soviet system so long as they are being daily influenced by the press of the millionaires—

that is, until they have also achieved socialism. But even then, when a world socialist community is attained, this system will never be "like Cæsar's wife." The essence of a world socialist community will be not its perfection but its imperfection. For only imperfection can act as a driving force for progress when the profit motive has been eliminated. Criticism and dissatisfaction with what *is* will be the main spur to progress, just as is the case in the U.S.S.R. to-day. But criticism of this kind will aim, not at restoring the old, but at perfecting the new.

I am often asked, after giving my views on the Soviet Union why I did not stay there if the country is such a good one to live in. And I feel that this question is a legitimate one and requires an answer. Why, indeed, if the U.S.S.R. is as I have described it have I not settled there for life?

Had I been an engineer, a doctor, or the possessor of any other specialized training of this kind, and had my main interest in life been in such a specialized sphere, I should have applied for Soviet citizenship years ago. For I am firmly convinced that there is a greater scope for anybody with a skilled craft in the Soviet Union to-day than in any other country. But, unfortunately, I have no skilled craft. A Cambridge degree in Economics does not fit its holder for anything much besides the teaching of Cambridge economics—or perhaps journalism. Certainly it does not fit the holder to be of any great use in building up a new social and economic system of a kind which Cambridge economics still hardly recognizes. And as far as journalism is concerned, the U.S.S.R. does not need to import journalists and I certainly should not choose to work as a journalist in a country whose literary language I could never hope to master.

And so it happens that, all things considered, and in spite of the fact that it is now my conviction that the U.S.S.R. alone of all countries has succeeded in solving the main social and economic problems of the twentieth century, I could not find for myself a permanent niche in that

community in preference to living and working in the country of my birth. It is not that the Soviet Union is not good enough for me : but rather that I, lacking the qualifications that would make me feel a really useful citizen in the U.S.S.R. to-day, do not feel that I could be as useful there as I can be in telling the truth about that country to the people here. When I first returned in 1936 I thought that too much had been written about people's experiences in the U.S.S.R. To-day I have changed my view. We have not nearly enough people in this country who have gone to the U.S.S.R. without illusions, and who can now interpret that country to the people of Britain. Yet if, as I believe, the U.S.S.R. has solved the main social and economic problems of the twentieth century, it is of vital importance that the facts be made known not only in Britain but in every country of the world. But powerful interests are at work in every country to suppress these facts. Therefore, every person with first-hand knowledge must make that knowledge known, must tell the world of that country where unemployment has been abolished, where the standard of life is steadily rising from year to year as production increases, and where not a single citizen man, woman, or child, can gain anything whatever from war or the preparation for war.

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